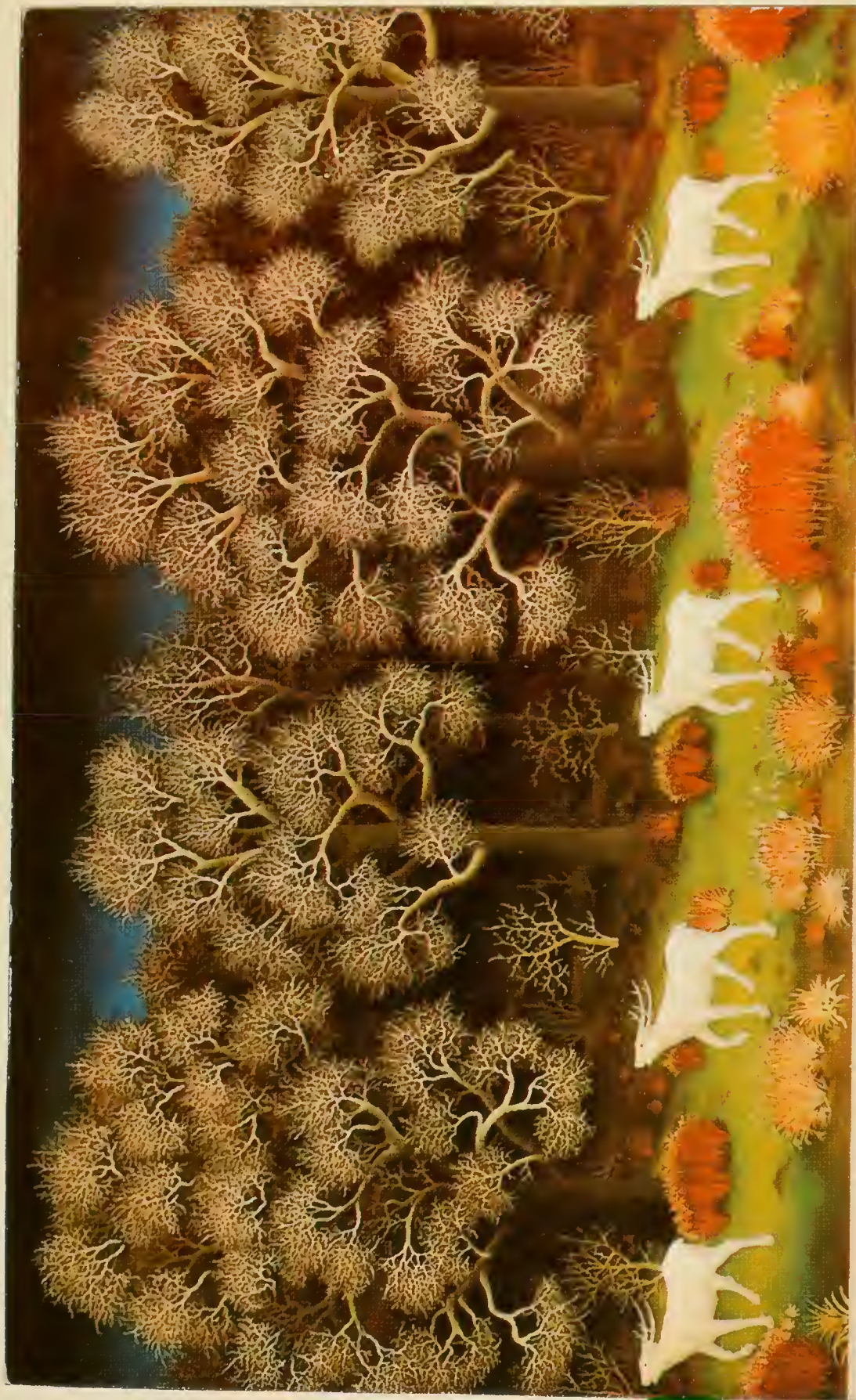


FIELD



FIELD

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CONTENTS

Marilyn Johnson	5	V.
	6	<i>The Probe</i>
~Philip Booth	7	<i>Out of the Ordinary</i>
	8	<i>Calendar</i>
Norman Dubie	9	<i>Coleridge Crossing the Plain of Jars: 1833</i>
Jerzy Harasymowicz	11	<i>The Myth of St. George</i>
	13	<i>Before Dawn in March</i>
	14	<i>The Land of November</i>
	15	<i>Twilight</i>
Marilyn Krysl	16	<i>Politics</i>
Linda Gregerson	18	<i>Fire in the Conservatory</i>
Benjamin Péret	20	<i>To Wait on the Street Corner</i>
Gary Snyder	21	<i>Poetry, Community, & Climax</i>
	37	<i>Axe Handles</i>
	38	<i>Old Rotting Tree Trunk Down</i>
William Stafford	40	<i>About These Poems</i>
	41	<i>Absences</i>
	42	<i>Murder Bridge</i>
	43	<i>A Certain Gate</i>
- Jon Anderson	44	<i>The Milky Way</i>
Richard Hugo	45	<i>Ayr</i>
Aloysius Bertrand	47	<i>Messire Jean</i>
	48	<i>Lepers</i>
Thomas Lux	49	<i>"Brother Leo Told Me the Bell Was Ringing": On Frank Stanford</i>

<i>Sandra McPherson</i>	56	<i>Two Poems on Bitch</i>
	57	<i>Games</i>
	58	<i>Blue-Black Image</i>
<i>Dennis Schmitz</i>	59	<i>City Ginkgos</i>
→ <i>John Woods</i>	60	<i>The Water Poem</i>
→ <i>Philip Levine</i>	62	<i>The Voice</i>
<i>Rainer Maria Rilke</i>	65	<i>Sonnets to Orpheus, Part Two</i>
	97	<i>Contributors</i>
	99	<i>Index</i>

V.

1.

Vanessa and Violet and Virginia
went to Greece. Vanessa got
sick. Violet got sick. Virginia went
crazy. Was this the work of women?

2.

Oh everyone dies. Alone in her room,
she counts them on her fingers,
then her toes. The whole world croaks
and sings outside her window,
no, below her window in the bushes.
No — in the water off the coast of Ives.
No — in front of the motorcar's blinders,
in the poisoned potatoes:
Virginia, Virginia,
why don't you marry and die?

3.

But first Vita and Virginia
went to France, didn't get sick.
Books got written. Read them or not,
don't you hear the voice of
their brilliant goat
in your sleep saying no one died,
mother's mending coats on the shorerocks,
father's being selfish at the dinnertable,
all the others are walking
through the fields, plucking flowers,
holding the yellow ones high.

THE PROBE

He is
etc. She's
and so on.
They spend a lot of time
at the same restaurant table,
stirring each other's soup.

He says, Love, love . . .
She says, Oh my happy heart.
She: Trim that Gothic moustache.
He: Make me.
Then the waitress brings fresh soup.

I take voluminous notes
at the next table.
I observe the way
they wipe each other's mouths
with the corner of a napkin.
This is no mere romance.
It is Saga.

At midnight, the waitress
kicks us all out.
I overpay the bill
in my hurry to catch up,
my coat flaps.
Lovers under streetlights,
rapid eye movement —
they drop to the curb
for a brief rest.

I'm not a nuisance.
They don't even try
to shoo me away.

OUT OF THE ORDINARY

Halfway south, in one
of hundreds of would-be cities
ending in *-ville*,
 he looked at dusk
out his motel window: a blackwoman
gardened the narrow strip between
the cementblock walls
 where he'd sleep
and where her own clapboards
faded toward white. A dog's lope beyond,
across the sideroad,
 a slow-pitch game
was beginning under the long-stemmed lights.
Over their flowering, nighthawks stunted;
the thinnest possible moon
 was just making up.
Out of the ordinary, too tired to rest,
he stood and looked: he looked and looked
for the joy of it.

CALENDAR

Two months after
the birth of her
June child, she found

in her neighbor's
backyard that she
couldn't talk. She

ran inside to
write on a pad
don't worry, and

found she couldn't
write. New Year's night
she'd found a mole

grown wild on her
arm. A couple of
lifetimes after

her neighbor held
her, her brother
-in-law came for

the child. She
shouted him out
the backdoor: *look*

at me, I'm a
corpse. . . . He ran.
She came that close.

COLERIDGE CROSSING THE PLAIN OF JARS: 1833

The gypsies carry sacks of walnuts out of the groves.
A dog
Whimpers below the cemetery, near to the peat field.

With regard to color primarily, but also
Scent and form,
The browsing deer under the sycamores
Have the very properties of a peach
Spoiled on the branch by a blanketing frost. . . .

The deer
Rise out of fog as though it were a pond.

I walk. And over the wind, I hear the crushing
Of talc for the shaping of a death mask. *Why is it?*

Young Keats is lost!

Joseph Severn's hurried sketch of the rouged corpse
Was like that deep violet thumbprint, this morning,
In the soft breast of the goose
Hung in a draughty printshop of my publishers!

Sarah watched from her window above the philodendron
While I crossed against the West Wind
Through the drifting snow. She lost sight of me
For a moment. She guessed I was again wrestling

The angel.

I did die there, briefly, in the blizzard
As I had once with my mother as a boy —
The first of April, nude except for our canvas shoes,
We stepped
Under the bitter waterfall fed with a run-off of snow.

My brain empties

As it will when I've stood under the compass
Of a great low chandelier, weighted
In the purity
Of vertical tiers of burning, citron candles.

The gypsies' bonfire climbs the stone face
Of the nunnery . . .
A Christmas pie, already sampled by the children,

Sits on the cleared table.
I stepped into the parlor, and Sarah said, "I thought
The elements had swallowed you
Just as you passed the last sycamore?"

She smiled in her chair, from half-dark,
And sewed —
I knew the chipped fire of pond ice
Was in her eyes
like a widow's soul. . . .

— *For Sherod Santos*

THE MYTH OF ST. GEORGE

While my patron
St. George
slept

I made
a red pillow case
from his banner

I gave his armor
to a peasant
to cover his stable

I turned the dragon
into a cow
that at times
belches sulphur fumes

I placed his
plumed helmet
on a nest
in the forest

my patron saint
awakes

where is the myth
it's at work

where is the helmet
it's laying eggs

where is the armor
it dozes on the roof
in the oppressive heat

where is the banner
under the mayor's head

and just like this
well what do you know

a saint began
to shoulder grain

to whitewash a hut

he even bought himself
another horse

1960

BEFORE DAWN IN MARCH

In March it's best to wake up before dawn
when the slender black forks in the orchards are bent by wind,
when, in the bordering grove, crocuses shrouded in white
wait for dawn so they can rise like saints from the dead
against a rosy horizon.

Poor Polish devils, intoxicated by witches, sit stiffly
in slippers,
then slide down from the roof with a thud and disappear
into the ground,
from behind a snow drift in the garden the barely opened
ears of rabbits resemble shears.
Like a great furry hat, the cat's head on the window sill
listens intently to what's going on in the hallway.

The fir trees lurk in the dusk — they're patrolling
the garden,
at the same time, coins, blackening in air, pour
continuously from the gutter
as from an old boot where a miser used to hide his money,
the shoe's icy sole — its life worn down — cracks in the thaw.

And you can already make out the low hills that are like
the roof of a farmhouse on which ravens,
like thatch blackened with age, whirl at any hint of a wind.
And you can already see how under the window, the first
blades of grass
are jumping like crickets here, there, through the white.

1957

THE LAND OF NOVEMBER

As I walk along the cottonfield the city's
Blue silhouette lies abandoned, distant in mists
The wind goes haywire in my rags
The sky rusts in the slanting rain

Here the moon has an ugly mug swollen on the side
facing the city
The hoodlums' whistles, like those of gophers,
are in the suburbs' burrows
The continental sobs of trains are far away
The lacquered little feet of authority scooted
through the brush

And only a jacket once left here
A patient jacket rots in the brush it has grey dreams
Indefinite hopes shiver in the distant forests
No man's land hums under a bloody glow of rust

In the fields in the lowlying smoke of November
Where these junk heaps of fall smoulder
I recall the brotherly manes of old buddies
The rotted shirt of youth the nicknames of a dynasty
of rakes

1965

TWILIGHT

Like angels, clouds bowed over the earth, their wings
touching each other in the calm,
but, suddenly, dogs began barking furiously at the
autumn hen over the road;
like the black tatters of an overcoat, ravens rise
into the air,
into the sky, where the last roses of October winds
are already dying.

Slowly, very slowly, the nests of the village Polomek
grow grey;
and you can barely see how the black chick of the church
raises its head
and holds two great moths crosswise in its yellow beak,
and on the small bridge amid aspens you can't tell
how many heads one horse has.

The moon's already above the earth, and looms in
the fog's haze
like the sanctuary doorway, silver, cruel.
Haystacks, huddled under shaggy coats of bear skin,
stand at attention everywhere as though they're waiting
coachmen.

1957

translated by John Pijewski

POLITICS

1.

The day of the first snow troops and tanks
seal off the area. On the balcony baskets of
roses. Generals make speeches in order of
rank. He had been drinking in the back seat,
spoke with pride of his victories. He let his
hand fall onto hers by accident. *I will kill myself*
if I have to be just one person. Your talent,
he tells her, is to be dependable. Dead boys
fall out of trees, one at a time, as though
taking turns. The waiter brings her fortune:
stay inside and you will get a good reward.

2.

In the general's hand the microphone
goes dead. The beautiful Oaxacan student

sobs over her lover's body, and the ministers
go down to the sea with long ropes. How soon,

they ask, can we tie up the monster? No,
they weren't in love: the woman — see how her

hand is broken off? She was holding out a scroll
with his fate written on it. Failure

to look for the god part in the bins of the
average. Now there are women on the sand. Now

there are women on the sand learned in ancient
mythologies. Cormorants tie up the ministers.

No sign of the acceptance of capitalism.
No weapon like the distribution of roses.

FIRE IN THE CONSERVATORY

The panes of glass arrived by boat
and sat in boxes for a year,
the man with the mansion in San Jose having died.
The workmen paid from a public collection had never seen

Cape Horn, though one of them loved
the wind through his scaffold, the fog
at its legs, and imagined the moorings might loosen
before they were done. He and the people's Crystal Palace

out to sea, his lunch in its box
attracting an escort of gulls. When the plants moved in,
Mr. Giles of the inspiration at Kew
dispatched a gift: seeds from the Royal Water Lily

sailed with a cargo of hemp through the Golden Gate, as once
down the Nile, up the Thames,
and, musing several seasons away, again
obliged with three-foot leaves. "Royal" for "big,"

or to show whose river counted most,
or because such leaves make the water a pavement
for any man's feet.

The birds of paradise squawked in their bowls.

Observe the plush mouths of dependency. The lily
squandered its blossoming on two
successive nights;
the caretaker's boys lit a road's length

of lanterns, and public officials
launched candles in paper boats: they all moved west.
The fog, remember. The carriage wheels.
The ladies' guild with a plaque. The children

slept for the most part, preferring
the parrot who lived in the central dome, who amused them
by biting the gardener's hose, who rolled a bright eye
and nursed a black tongue.

TO WAIT ON THE STREET CORNER

The storm bursts at the back of the most secret drawers
and it's a fight to the finish
between the comb and the salsify
The comb has salsify teeth
and the salsify's hair falls to its feet
They stare at each other like china dogs
and these dogs shatter like glass
Because they wanted to bark
and the china wouldn't let them
Goodbye china dog salsify comb
My vest buttons sing at the top of their lungs
and the upper one takes the trolley
He rides to Villette
He walks down the Rue de Flandre
where he buys some wooden shoes
and the trolley tracks applaud him
He salutes the steaming horse dung
over which sparrows wheel and spin
Oh what horsemanship cries an old lady
who wears a pair of sugar tongs in the top of her bun
And her great-grandchildren who limp
those born in even years
limping with the left leg
and the others with the right
pursue some mating dogs throwing stones at them
It's raining
and the old lady's hair melts in the sugar tongs
Her head is just a huge beet
whose leaves have been eaten by the children
The beet trembles
and the houses slide away like melted butter
spread out like parachutes
meanwhile my vest buttons
go off arm in arm like drunk sailors

translated by Keith Hollaman

POETRY, COMMUNITY, & CLIMAX

I

I wrote a small piece ten years ago called "Poetry and the Primitive." It was subtitled "Poetry as an ecological survival technique." In a brisk and simple way, I was trying to indicate what modern people might want to learn and use from the way poetry/song works in a strong, self-contained pre-literate society. I have also spoken of poetry's function as an occasional voice for the non-human rising within the human realm, and the value of that. Survival.

But it's clear now, 1979, that survival is not exactly the problem. Not for human beings, who will survive come hell or high water — and both may — to find themselves sole operators of the equipment on a planet where vertebrate evolution has come to an end. Clouds of waterfowl, herds of bison, great whales in the ocean, will be — almost are — myths from the dream-time. As is, already, "the primitive" in any virgin sense of the term. Biological diversity, and the integrity of organic evolution on this planet, is where I take my stand: not a large pretentious stand, but a straightforward feet-on-the-ground stand, like my grandmother nursing her snapdragons and trying at grafting apples. It's also inevitably the stand of the poet, child of the Muse, singer of saneness and weaver of rich fabric to delight the mind with possibilities opening both inward and outward.

There is a huge investment in this nation: bridges, railway tracks, freeways, downtown office buildings, airports, aircraft carriers, miles of subdivisions, docks, ore-carriers, factories. All that belongs to somebody, and they don't want to see it become useless, unprofitable, obsolete. In strict terms of cash flow and energy flow it still works, but the hidden costs are enormous and those who pay that cost are not the owners. I'm speaking of course not only of human alienation but air and water, stands of trees, and all the larger, more specialized, rarer birds and animals of the world who pay the cost of "America"

with their bodies — as mentioned above. To keep this investment working, the several thousand individuals who own it have about convinced the rest of us that we are equal owners with them of it; using language like "don't turn out the lights," "let's not go back to the stone age," and "you've worked hard for what you got, don't lose it now." Their investment requires continual growth, or it falters; and a "steady state economy" — "small is beautiful" are terrifying concepts for them because without growth, the gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth in this land would become starkly clear. From this it's evident that the future of capitalism and perhaps all industrial society is intimately staked on the question of nuclear energy — no other way to keep up growth. This leads to the disastrous fast breeder reactor (which is not dead yet by a long shot), and the fast breeder leads to a police state. But food shortages may bring it down even before energy shortages — the loss of soils and the growing inefficiencies of chemical fertilizers.

I repeat this well-known information to remind us, then, that monoculture heavy industry television automobile culture is not an ongoing accident; it is deliberately fostered. Any remnant city neighborhood of good cheer and old friendships, or farming community that "wants to stay the way it is" are threats to the investment. Without knowing it, little old ladies in tennis shoes who work to save Whooping Cranes are enemies of the state, along with other more flamboyant figures. I guess there are revolutionaries who still hope for their own kind of monocultural industrial utopia, however. And there are some for whom alienation is a way of life, an end in itself. It's helpful to remember that what we'd hope for on the planet is creativity and sanity, conviviality, the real work of our hands and minds: those apples and snapdragons. Existential *angst* won't go away nohow, if that's how you get your energy.

Although it's clear that we cannot again have seamless primitive cultures, or the purity of the archaic, we can have neighborhood and community. Communities strong in their sense of place, proud and aware of local and special qualities, creating to some extent their own cultural forms, not humble or

subservient in the face of some "high cultural" over-funded art form or set of values, are in fact what one healthy side of the original American vision was about. They are also, now, critical to "ecological survival." No amount of well-meaning environmental legislation will halt the biological holocaust without people who live where they are and work with their neighbors, taking responsibility for their place, and *seeing to it*: to be inhabitants, and to not retreat. We feel this to be starting in America: a mosaic of city neighborhoods, small towns, and rural places where people are digging in and saying "if not now when? if not here, where?" This trend includes many sorts of persons, some of whom are simply looking out for themselves and finding a better place to live. The process becomes educational, and even revolutionary, when one becomes aware of the responsibility that goes with "rootedness" and the way the cards are stacked against it; we live in a system that rewards those who leap for the quick profit and penalizes those who would do things carefully with an eye to quality. Decentralization could start with food production. Old/new style biologically sophisticated farming doesn't imply total local self-sufficiency, but at least the capacity to provide food and fiber needs within a framework of two or three hundred miles. Then come new definitions of territory and region, and fresh ways to see local government limits — watershed politics, bio-region consciousness. Sense of community begins to include woodpeckers and cottontails. Decentralization includes the decentralization of "culture," or poetry.

II

Now to speak of 25 years of poetry readings in the U.S. When I was working on the docks in San Francisco and occasionally taking night courses in conversational Japanese around '52 or '53, writing poems and sending them off to magazines, *Kenyon Review*, and *Hudson Review* and *Partisan*, and getting them back, we had no sense of a community of poets and even less of an audience. Kenneth Rexroth held open house in his apartment on Friday evenings, and four or five or sometimes ten people

might drop by; some out of an old Italian anarchist group, some from the filmmakers and artists circles of the Bay Area. In 1954 I knew virtually every poet, filmmaker and artist in the region. I hardly know who works in Berkeley anymore, let alone the rest.

In 1955 because Allen Ginsberg and Philip Whalen, Michael McClure, Philip Lamantia and several others, and myself, found ourselves with large numbers of unpublished poems on our hands, it occurred to us to give a poetry reading. It was like holding a sale. In those days all we ever thought of doing with poetry was to get it published; we didn't know who saw it, and didn't think to offer it up publicly. But we went ahead and organized a poetry reading. We did have a model or two; Dylan Thomas had passed through a year before; Ted Roethke had come down from Seattle and read; the San Francisco poetry center had organized a few readings in five or six years. Still, poetry readings were definitely not a part of the cultural and social landscape. That reading held in November 1955 in a space borrowed from an art gallery was a curious kind of turning point in American poetry. It succeeded beyond our wildest thoughts. In fact, we weren't even thinking of success; we were just trying to invite some friends and potential friends, and we borrowed a mailing list from the art gallery and sent out maybe two hundred postcards. Poetry suddenly seemed useful in 1955 San Francisco. From that day to this, there has never been a week without a reading in the Bay Area — actually more like three a night, counting all the coffee shops, plus schools, the art museum, the aquarium, and the zoo. Those early readings led to publication for some. *Howl* became the second book in Lawrence's Pocket Poets series, and Allen's extensive early readings all over the United States began to draw audiences of a size not seen before. Kerouac's novels were published, and the "beat generation" was launched. Allen was to a great extent responsible for generating the excitement, but a number of other poets (myself not among them because I had gone to Japan) travelled widely over the United States landing like crows first in coffee houses and later becoming gradually accepted more and more into the network of universities.

One thing that was clearly an error in the mentality of the early fifties literary world was the idea that poetry cannot have an audience, and indeed that it was a little shameful if a poem was too popular. There are people who still believe that, incidentally. There was also the defeatist attitude that "we live in a philistine culture" and no one is interested in art anyway, so we'll just write to each other. My generation found that by boldly, to put it bluntly, having something to say, helped with audiences. It also should be apparent that one is not *owed* an audience by the culture; but one can indeed go out and try to build an audience. Building that audience is done in part by going on the road and using your voice and your body to put the poems out there; and to speak to the people's condition, as the Quakers would say, to speak to the conditions of your own times, and not worry about posterity. If you speak to the condition of your times with some accuracy and intention, then it may speak to the future, too. If it doesn't, fine, we live in the present. So poetry readings as a new cultural form enhanced and strengthened poetry itself, and the role of the poet. They also taught us that poetry really is an oral art. It would be fascinating to undertake an examination of how poetry of the last 20 years has been shaped by the feedback that comes with reading in front of people. Poems go through revisions, adaptations and enhancements following on the sense of how audiences have been hearing you. So there is a communal aspect to the evolution of the art. Does this mean that poets, knowing that they were writing for an audience, might have catered to that possibility? Sure. But it also means that audiences have come up to the possibility of hearing better over the years. My experience is that the latter tends to be the case and that audiences have grown in maturity and the poetry with them. With a skilled audience, such as you often find in New York or San Francisco (and recently in Midwestern cities like Minneapolis), the poet knows that he/she can try for more, and really push it to the difficult, the complex, the outrageous, and see where the mind of the people will go.

This practice of poetry reading has had an effect on the poets who were quite content to regard poetry as a written art that

sits on a printed page and belongs in libraries, too. They have been forced to actually learn how to read poetry aloud better out of sheer competition if nothing else. There are economic rewards involved.

Poetry belongs to everybody, but there are always a few skilled raconteurs or creators or singers, and we live in a time in which the individual actor or creator is particularly valued. The art wouldn't die out if we lost track of the name of the fellow who made it up, though, and the fact that we don't know the names of the men or women who made the songs in the past doesn't really matter.

All of this goes one more step, then, to a conscious concern and interest on the part of some poets in the actual performance skills of pre-literate people. My own studies in anthropology, linguistics, and oral literature, brought me to the realization that the performance, in a group context, is the pinnacle of poetic activity and precision, and we have yet to develop the possibilities of that circle with music, dance and drama in their original archaic poetic relationship. The Ainu singers of Hokkaido chant their long epic stories to a beat. The guslars of southern Yugoslavia use a little dulcimer-like stringed instrument. No wonder we say "lyric poetry" — they used to sing with a lyre. Most of the songs that you hear on the country and western hit parade are in good old English ballad meter, showing that the ballad is the backbone of English-language poetics and will be for a long time to come. Other examples, simple examples: Robert Bly knows almost all his poems by heart and Roethke knew his. Reciting from memory (which I can't do) liberates your hands and mind for the performance — liberates your eyes. Nō drama, with its aristocratic spareness and simplicity, could be another model. Percussive, almost non-melodic music is very strong; a bare stage is all you need.

In this era of light shows, huge movie screens, and quadraphonic sound systems, it is striking that an audience will still come to hear a plain, ordinary unaugmented human being using nothing but voice and language. That tells us that people do appreciate the compression, the elegance, and the myriad im-

ageries that come out of this art of distilling language and giving it measure which is called poetry.

III

The next step then is to ask what has a more public poetry done for the possibility of community? The modern poetry audience has a certain kind of network associated with it. Everywhere I go I meet people I know — from one corner of the United States to the other I never give a reading anymore but at least one person comes out of the audience, an old friend. A dozen other people that I haven't met before step up to tell me about how they are riding their horses or growing sunflowers somewhere, or are in the middle of making a Zendo inside an old building downtown. It's a fine exchange of news and information, and also the reaffirmation of a certain set of interests to which I (among others) speak. The community that is called together by such events is not just literary. It's interesting to see, then, that the universities have served as community halls, public space, that draw out people from beyond the immediate academic world. In other times and places such public spaces have been river beds — which is no man's land — where the gypsies and the travelling drama companies are allowed to put up their tents, or where the homeless samurai are allowed to act out their final duels with each other and nobody cares — it might be river beds, it might be the streets, or temples and churches — or in the tantric tradition of late medieval north India, some groups met in cemeteries.

What is this network of interests and old friends I speak of? None other than that branch of the stalwart counter-culture that has consistently found value and inspiration in poetry, and intellectual excitement in watching the unfolding of twentieth-century poetics. Also certain sets of values have been — in recent decades — more clearly stated in poetry than any other medium. (Other post-World War II cultural branches are primarily affiliated to music; some to more specific and intellectually formulated political or religious ideologies; a few go directly to crafts,

or to gardening.) Anyway: the people who found each other via poetry readings in the late fifties and sixties produced another generation of poets who were committed to an oral poetics and a non-elite vision of communicating to larger and more diverse audiences. There are roughly three shoots from that root. I'll call them the dealers, the home-growers, and the ethno-botanists.

The "dealers" came in part with the growth of a certain academic and social acceptance of new poets and their readings, which led to the poetry policies of the NEA; the founding of the little magazines and small presses support organizations, the poets-in-the-schools programs, and on the academic side, several MFA-in-writing programs at several universities; workshops in poetry. At this point, via the poets-in-the-schools programs in particular, twentieth-century poetry began to find its way into ordinary American communities. The programs employed people who had gotten their MFA or a little book published (through a small press, with federal aid often) — and put them into high schools or grade schools, doing creative work, creative word playfulness, image playfulness; generating imagination and spontaneity among school children whose usual teachers couldn't. I consider this quite valid as a mode of poetic imagination and practice in its broadest sense filtering down through the population. The school districts themselves, after some resistance, began to accept the possibilities of poets and other artists doing local residencies. For every horror story of a brought-in poet reading a poem to the sixth grade with the word "penis" in it, there are countless unadvertised little openings of voice and eye as children got that quick view of playfulness, of the flexibility and power of their own mind and mother-tongue. I've watched this at work in my own school district, which is rural and short on money, but has backed the artists in schools as far as it could. In fact this school district (and many others) has chosen to keep arts programs going even after state or federal funding is withdrawn. One local poet found that what the children needed first was an introduction to the basic sense of story and of lore. He became the master of lore, myth, and word-hoard for the whole district. By much research and imagination, he pro-

vided, following the calendar and seasons, the true information — as story — about what Easter, May Day, Christmas, Hanukkah, Halloween, and Lammas are about. Neither the parents or the school teachers in most cases could provide this fundamental lore of their own culture to the children. The poet was Steve Sanfield, doing the work of mythographer to the community in the ancient way.

The “home-growers” (and the above folks often overlap with this) are those poets who themselves live in a place with some intention of staying there — and begin to find their poetry playing a useful role in the daily life of the neighborhood. Poetry as a tool, a net or trap to catch and present; a sharp edge; a medicine, or the little awl that unties knots. Who are these poets? I haven’t heard of most of them, neither have you; perhaps we never will. The mandarins of empire-culture arts organizations in the U.S. might worry about little-known poets working in the schools, because they are afraid of a decline in “standards of quality.” I think I am second to none in my devotion to Quality; I throw myself at the lotus feet of Quality and shiver at the least tremor of her crescent-moon eyebrow. What they really fear is losing control over the setting of standards. But there is room for many singers, and not everyone need aspire to national-level publication, national reputation. The United States is, bio-regionally speaking, too large to ever be a comprehensible social entity except as maintained at great expense and effort via the media and bureaucracy. The price people pay for living in the production called American society is that they are condemned to continually watch television and read newspapers to know “what’s happening,” and thus they have no time to play with their own children or get to know the neighbors or birds or plants or seasons. What a dreadful cost! This explains why I do not even try to keep up with what’s going on in nation-wide poetry publishing. We are talking about real culture now, the culture that things *grow* in, and not the laboratory strains of seeds that lead to national reputation. Poetry is written and read for real people: it should be part of the gatherings where we make decisions about what to do about uncontrolled growth, or

local power-plants, and who's going to be observer at the next county supervisors' meeting. A little bit of music is played by the guitarists and five-string banjo players, and some poems come down from five or six people who are really good — speaking to what is happening *here*. They shine a little ray of myth on things; memory turning to legend.

It's also useful to raise a sum of money for a local need with a benefit poetry reading, and it's good to know this can be done successfully maybe twice a year. It works, a paying audience comes, because it's known that it will be a strong event. Sooner or later, if a poet keeps on living in one place, he is going to have to admit to everyone in town and on the backroads that he writes poetry. To then appear locally is to put your own work to the real test — the lady who delivers the mail might be there, and the head sawyer of the local mill. What a delight to mix all levels of poems together, and to see the pleasure in the eyes of the audience when a local tree, a local river or mountain, comes swirling forth as part of proto-epic or myth. (Michael McClure once said his two favorite provincial literary periodicals were *Kuksu*, "A Journal of Northern California Backcountry Writing," and *The New York Review of Books*. Two poetry-reading invitations that I count as great honors were to the Library of Congress, and the North San Juan Fire Hall.) It is a commitment to place, and to your neighbors, that — with no loss of quality — accomplishes the decentralization of poetry. The decentralization of "culture" is as important to our long-range ecological and social health as the decentralization of agriculture, production, energy, and government.

By the "ethno-botanist" shoot from that sixties root I mean the roving specialists and thinkers in poetics, politics, anthropology, and biology who are pursuing the study of what it would mean to be citizens of natural nations; to be part of stable communities; participants in a sane society. We do this with the point in mind that the goal of structural political change is not a crazy society, but a sane one. These are in a sense studies in post-revolutionary possibilities, and in the possibilities of making small gains now; "forming the new society within the shell of the old."

Such are (and though I list them here it doesn't mean they necessarily agree with all or anything I say) Bob Callahan and associates at Turtle Island foundation; Peter Berg and the Planet Drum group; Joe Meeker, Vine Deloria, Jr., and others working on the "new natural philosophy"; The Farallones Institute; Jerome Rothenberg and the *New Wilderness Newsletter*; Dennis Tedlock and *Alcheringa* magazine; Stewart Brand's *Co-Evolution Quarterly*; the long list of useful publications from Richard Grossinger and Lindy Hough; the Lindisfarne Association; New Alchemy; and in another more technical dimension, Stanley Diamond's work and his journal *Dialectical Anthropology*. *Organic Gardening* and other Rodale Press publications, with their consistent emphasis on *health* as the basic measure, might also belong on this list. There are others; I'm not even mentioning poetry magazines in this context. As a sort of ethno-botanist myself, I make the following offering:

IV

Poetry as song is there from birth to death. There are songs to ease birth, good luck songs to untie knots to get babies born better; there are lullabies that you sing to put the babies to sleep — Lilith Abye — ("get away Negative mother image!"); there are songs that children sing on the playground that are beginning poetries —

baby baby suck your toe
all the way to Mexico

Kindergarden baby
wash your face in gravy

(I get these from my kids) or

Going down the highway, 1954,
Batman let a big one, blew me out the door —
wheels wouldn't take it,
engine fell apart,
all because of Batman's supersonic fart.

(If you start poetry teaching on the grade school level, use rhyme, they love it. Go with the flow, don't go against it. Children love word play, music of language; it really sobered me up to realize that not only is rhyme going to be with us but it's a good thing.) And as we get older, about 11 or 12 years, we go into the work force and start picking strawberries or drying apples; and work songs come out of that. Individually consciously created poetry begins when you start making up love songs to a sweetie, which are called courting songs. Then, some individuals are sent out in adolescence to see if they can get a power vision song all by themselves. They go out and come back with a song which is their own, which gives them a name, and power; some begin to feel like a "singer." There are those who use songs for hunting, and those who use a song for keeping themselves awake at night when they are riding around slow in circles taking care of the cows. People who use songs when they haul up the nets on the beach. And when we get together we have drinking songs and all kinds of communal pleasure gathering group music. There are war songs, and particular specialized powerful healing songs that are brought back by those individuals (shamans) who make a special point of going back into solitude for more songs: which will enable them to heal. There are also some who master and transmit the complex of songs and chants that contain creation-myth lore and whatever ancient or cosmic gossip that a whole People sees itself through. In the occident we have such a line, starting with Homer and going through Virgil, Dante, Milton, Blake, Goethe, and Joyce. They were workers who took on the ambitious chore of trying to absorb all the myth/history lore of their times, and of their own past traditions, and put it into order as a new piece of writing and let it be a map or model of world and mind for everyone to steer by.

It's also clear that in all the households of non-literate ordinary farming and working people for the past fifty thousand years the context of poetry and literature has been around the fire at night — with the children and grandparents curled up together and somebody singing or telling. Poetry is thus an intimate part of the power and health of sane people. What then? What of the danger of becoming provincial, encapsulated, self-

righteous, divisive — all those things that we can recognize as being sources of mischief and difficulty in the past?

That specialized variety of poetry which is the most sophisticated, and is the type which most modern poetry would aspire to be, is the “healing songs” type. This is the kind of healing that makes whole, heals by making whole, that kind of doctoring. The poet as healer is asserting several layers of larger realms of wholeness. The first larger realm is identity with the natural world, demonstrating that the social system, a little human enclave, does not stand by itself apart from the plants and the animals and winds and rains and rivers that surround it. Here the poet is a voice for the nonhuman, for the natural world, actually a vehicle for another voice, to send it into the human world, saying there is a larger sphere out there; that the humans are indeed children of, sons and daughters of, and eternally in relationship with, the earth. Human beings buffer themselves against seeing the natural world directly. Language, custom, ego and personal advantage strategies all work against clear seeing. So the first wholeness is wholeness with nature.

The poet as myth-handler-healer is also speaking as a voice for another place, the deep unconscious, and working toward integration of interior unknown realms of mind with present moment immediate self-interest consciousness. The outer world of nature and the inner world of the unconscious are brought to a single focus occasionally by the work of the dramatist-ritualist artist-poet. That’s another layer. Great tales and myths can give one tiny isolated society the breadth of mind and heart to be *not* provincial and to know itself as a piece of the cosmos.

The next layer, when it works, is harder: that’s the layer that asserts a level of humanity with other people outside your own group. It’s harder actually because we are in clear economic dependence and interrelationship with our immediate environment; if you are gathering milkweed, fishing, picking berries, raising apples, and tending a garden it shouldn’t be too difficult to realize that you have some relationship with nature. It’s less obvious what to do with the folks that live on the other

side of the mountain range, speaking another language; they're beyond the pass, and you can faintly feel them as potential competitors. We must go beyond just feeling at one with nature, and feel at one with each other; with ourselves. That's where all natures intersect. Too much to ask for? Only specialists, mystics, either through training or good luck arrive at that. Yet it's the good luck of poetry that it sometimes presents us with the accomplished fact of a moment of true nature, of total thusness:

Peach blossoms are by nature pink
Pear blossoms are by nature white.

This level of healing is a kind of poetic work that is forever "just begun." When we bring together our awareness of the world-wide network of folktale and myth imagery that has been the "classical tradition" — the lore-bearer — of everyone for ten thousand and more years, and the new (but always there) knowledge of the worldwide interdependence of natural systems, we have the bio-poetic beginning of a new level of world poetry and myth. That's the beginning for this age, the age of knowing the planet as one eco-system, our own little watershed, a community of people and beings, a place to sing and meditate, a place to pick berries, a place to be picked in.

The communities of creatures in forests, ponds, oceans, or grasslands seem to tend toward a condition called climax, "virgin forest" — many species, old bones, lots of rotten leaves, complex energy pathways, woodpeckers living in snags and conies harvesting tiny piles of grass. This condition has considerable stability and holds much energy in its web — energy that in simpler systems (a field of weeds just after a bulldozer) is lost back into the sky or down the drain. All of evolution may have been as much shaped by this pull toward climax as it has by simple competition between individuals or species. If human beings have any place in this scheme it might well have to do with their most striking characteristic — a large brain, and language. And a consciousness of a peculiarly self-conscious order. Our human awareness and eager poking, probing, and studying is our begin-

ning contribution to planet-system energy-conserving; another level of climax!

In a climax situation a high percentage of the energy is derived not from grazing off the annual production of biomass, but from recycling dead biomass, the duff on the forest floor, the trees that have fallen, the bodies of dead animals. Recycled. Detritus cycle energy is liberated by fungi and lots of insects. I would then suggest: as climax forest is to biome, and fungus is to the recycling of energy, so "Enlightened Mind" is to daily ego mind, and art to the recycling of neglected inner potential. When we deepen or enrich ourselves, looking within, understanding ourselves, we come closer to being like a climax system. Turning away from grazing on the "immediate biomass" of perception, sensation, and thrill; and re-viewing memory, internalized perception, blocks of inner energies, dreams, the leaf-fall of day-to-day consciousness, liberates the energy of our own sense-detritus. Art is an assimilator of un-felt experience, perception, sensation, and memory for the whole society. When all that compost of feeling and thinking comes back to us then, it comes not as a flower, but — to complete the metaphor — as a mushroom: the fruiting body of the buried threads of mycelia that run widely through the soil, and are intricately married to the root-hairs of all the trees. "Fruiting" — at that point — is the completion of the work of the poet, and the point where the artist or mystic re-enters the cycle: gives what she or he has done as nourishment, and as spore or seed, to spread the "thought of enlightenment" and this practice of reaching into personal depths for nutrients hidden there, back to the community. The community and its poetry are not two. In finishing, this poem:

FOR ALL

Ah to be alive
on a mid-September morn
fording a stream
barefoot, pants rolled up,
holding boots, pack on,
sunshine, ice in the shallows,
northern rockies.

rustle and shimmer of icy creek waters
stones turn underfoot, small and hard as toes
cold nose dripping
singing inside
creek music, heart music,
smell of sun on gravel.

I pledge allegiance.
I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island
and to the beings who thereon dwell
one ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun
with joyful interpenetration for all.

AXE HANDLES

One afternoon the last week in April
Showing Kai how to throw a hatchet
One-half turn and it sticks in a stump
And he recalls the hatchet-head
Without a handle, in the shop,
And go gets it, and wants it for his own.
A broken-off axe handle behind the door
Is long enough for a hatchet,
We cut it to length and take it,
With the hatchet head
And working hatchet, to the wood block.
There I begin to shape the old handle
With the hatchet, and the phrase
First learned from Pound, rings
 in my ears!

"When making an axe handle
 the pattern is not far off!"
And I say this to Kai,
"Look! We'll shape the handle
By checking the handle
Of the axe we cut with!"
And he sees. And I get the
Quote right, from Lu Chi's *Wen Fu*
Preface, "In making the handle
Of an axe
By cutting wood with an axe
The model is indeed near at hand."
My teacher Shih-hsiang Chen
Translated that and said it years ago.
And I see — he was an axe,
And I am an axe
And my son a handle, soon
To be shaping again, model
And tool, craft of culture,
How we go on.

OLD ROTTING TREE TRUNK DOWN

Winding grain
Of twisting outer spiral shell

Stubby broken limbs at angles
Peeled-off outer layers askew;
A big rock
Locked in taproot clasp
Now lifted to the air;
Amber beads of ancient pitch
In powdery cracks of red dry rot
 fallen away
From the pitchy heartwood core.

Beautiful body we walk on:
Up and across to miss
 the wiry manzanita mat
On a slope of rock and air,
Breeze without cease.

If meditation on decay and rot cures lust,
I'm hopeless.
I delight in thought of fungus,
Beetle larvae, stains,
 that suck the life still
 from your old insides,

Under crystal sky.
And the woodpecker flash from
Tree to tree
In a grove of your heirs
On green-watered bench right there.

Looking out at blue lakes,
Dripping snowpatch
 soaking glacial rubble,
Crumbling rocky cliffs and scree,

Corruption, decay, the sticky turnover
Death into more of the
Life-death same,

A quick life.
And the long slow
Feeding that follows;
Death in its place.

English Mountain
7 August '78

ABOUT THESE POEMS

Of brass, though broken. See? — almost
of gold: a room inside a stone holds
these poems. They're not for sale. You rent
these poems by what it takes to read them.

They take you places: a few glances
— you're there. Listen — the miles
are lying down; their trees and hills
are accepting the gift of evening.

Have you felt your reflection in old silver? —
how it comes toward you and peers? Don't
look away, don't be afraid: someone
you know may be looking for you.

This world is a strange place. It's not
simple. A hand holds out whatever
the next thing is. Sometimes you take it,
like it, sometimes you turn away.

ABSENCES

Once when the waves were talking one said
"I'll never be back." And then the rest
ran on toward shore, but that one went forth
so far it's never been seen again.

When you walk along sometimes, you think
of that absent wave — and of all that doesn't
exist any more, things of the other
years. "They'll never be back," you say.

You stop and look out. It's already tomorrow
somewhere, and someone like you is walking;
a wave is beginning to speak, and the rest
shrug and go on. You stand and care.

Much has never existed, you know.
You think of things to say. The waves
come in. Wherever you walk you see
a place for that wave. But it isn't there.

MURDER BRIDGE

You look over the edge, down, down . . . —
there's where the poor crazy mother threw
them, all three, her children she loved. They hurtled
and struck far there, once, then whirled
from rock to rock on into the rapid,
were found miles on, pieces their mother
had to see forever, the rest of her life.

It's quiet here. The rocks dream in the sun.
Our parents remembered the story. Our hands
gripped white on the railing. We felt the earth tilt.
We never thought the world was easy, as we
drove on. Luck — it takes luck and the sun
shining, and that mother recovered and crying
in our world saying, "Little ones, little ones."

A CERTAIN GATE

A vein in the forehead — knows — all
that the other veins — know —, reviews of the day
by nightfall, glimpses of dawn.
Where this vein veers, God lives,
a gate, an amazing hinge, that opens
on everything else. But it has to bow down sometimes.

To get in, that sill is carved, and small;
crossed, it gives Heaven, a flare
and a dance and a song that nothing can — touch.
All space it knows, even when — closed —
or a blaze that — pours — when it's wide.

THE MILKY WAY

When I was a boy, the Milky Way
 Floated just over the City
Of Boston, so I was lucky to live
 In that place, that
House where my father lathered
 His face & like the moon
Went out, came back, walking
 Winter nights beneath
The Milky Way. Few thoughts,
 Few fears, a way of
Sleeping through the night.

When my son lay sewn
To the sheets, adrift in his
 Diabetic coma among
The blown, seductive stars,
 I could not think of
Anything to say, for he was
 Not anywhere nearby;
But he said *Pa-pa* & came back.
 Tonight, in his play,
He captains a sleek starship
 Toward the Milky Way.

When I was a boy, the City of
 Boston lay miles away
Within our sight. Evenings we
 Set our chairs upon
The lawn & talked. Few thoughts,
 A way of watching until
Dark. Then as our small wickers
 Floated through the night
I wished I might be taken away
 To live forever in that
Distant city made wholly of light.

AYR

You might die anywhere. You will die in Ayr
north of the river, in the Newton Cafe.
You'll die to no notice in the Orient Cinema
in the balcony.

When you die in Ayr, if you die
in the Newton Cafe, jars of good cheap candy
on shelves back of the counter
will remind the investigating officer of home.

If you die in the Orient Cinema
George C. Scott will not be on the screen,
not at your final moment.
The janitor will find you. No reaction.

South of the river the town of Ayr's alive.
New shops. New shopping center. The tongue
will be Braid at the inquest.
You won't understand.

The next town north is Prestwick. Big international
airport. BOAC as usual, late.
Whoever was coming to visit will say
he's not here. Where is he?

You'll die in Ayr
where warehouses rent for next to nothing
and rats complain, no rats other than them.
The report will read: not from here.

The report will read: foreigner, deceased.
The investigating officer
will ask the girl back of the counter at the Newton Cafe
to a movie.

Visitors will make their way to Glasgow.
Scotland is not bewildering.
People are helpful. The food is uninteresting.
Lots of castles in beautiful ruin.

Try Ayr in the offseason. Try
the Newton Cafe some early winter evening.
Scampi and chips. Try staring
out the window at some earlier street.

Don't try dying. I just said that to mention
Ayr. In the Orient a couple holds hands
and George C. Scott shows them how to act.
Try Ayr north of the river. Try some earlier home.

MESSIRE JEAN

*"A grave figure whose gold chain and
white ring announced his authority."*

— Walter Scott, *The Abbé*

"Messire Jean," said the Queen, "come look in the palace courtyard and tell me why those two greyhounds are fighting." And he goes over.

And when he is down there, the Seneschal gives a good talking to the hounds, who are fighting over a hambone.

But now they're tearing off his black breeches and biting his red stockings. They knock him over like a man with the gout stumbling over his crooked stick.

"For the love of God help me!" he cries, and the court halberdiers come running. But the muzzles of the greyhounds have already burrowed into the dainty purse of the simpleton.

Now the Queen is dying with laughter, standing at a window in her tall wimple from Malines, as tautly pleated as a fan.

"And why are they fighting, Messire?"

"They are fighting, Madame, because you are the wisest, the most beautiful, and the grandest princess in the universe."

LEPERS

*Do not come into our ranks, friend;
These are the kennels of lepers.
— The Lay of the Lepers*

Each morning, as soon as the arbors drink in the dew, the hospital doors swing open and the lepers, like anchorites, go deep into deserts, into valleys of heretics, to primitive edens whose long, tranquil perspectives are inhabited only by deer grazing on the flowering grasses, and by herons fishing in the sunny marshes.

Some of them have cleared away small gardens: a rose is more fragrant to them, a fig more succulent for having been tended by their hands. A few others make eel-pots out of willow branches, or carve goblets from pieces of boxwood, in rocky caves overgrown with brambles and overrun by the sand rising from a living spring. Thus they try to cheat the hours which pass so quickly in joy, and so slowly in suffering.

But there are some who never venture further than the hospital door. These — enfeebled, languishing, inconsolable — lead their shadows around the four high walls of the courtyard, keeping one eye on the sundial whose needle hastens the flight of their lives, and urges them nearer their eternity.

And when, leaning back against the heavy columns, they go off into their thoughts, there is nothing that could interrupt the silence of this place, except the cries of a wedge of cranes working its way through a cloud, or the clicking of a friar's rosary as he hurries down a corridor, or the rattles of the watchmen who, at evening, lead these abject hermits back into their cells.

translated by James Weeks

"BROTHER LEO TOLD ME THE BELL WAS RINGING":
ON FRANK STANFORD

Frank Stanford died, a suicide, on June 3rd, 1978. He was 29 years old. He and I had never met but we corresponded for a number of years, particularly between 1972-76. I felt close to him and I loved his work. His letters were full of warmth, wild tales, and an intense love of poetry. I think what I loved most about him, his letters, and his poems were their landscapes. Both the literal — rural Arkansas, the rivers, levees, swamps, farms, woods, small towns — and the internal, the imaginative. The stories, the lives of these landscapes are prodigiously imagined. His best poems are perfectly lucid as well as metaphorically reverberating:

PLACE ON A GRAVE

It's hard to forget what they ate
Every winter, when the father
And the oldest brother went back to do time,
Cowpeas and smoked goat, all winter
The same muddy supper, their voices
Thick as pan bread, the hollering
At dawn when the mother went out
To the pens in cowboy boots
With a bucket of feed and a roll
Of toilet paper, finding a swatch
Of her daughter's nightgown
Fluttering on the barbed-wire
The hollering and calling
The rest of them did when they
Raised up from their cold beds
And went out searching at first light
For their crippled sister, who dreamed
Walking over mountains
In the dead of winter, the smell
Of cooking in her hair, believing
She was gone from there, dignified
Like a wooden figure on the prow
Of a ship with no horizon.

(from *Ladies From Hell*)

His poems talk so easily, their language so transportive, that when I read them I'm partly in this world and partly in another. The sure tone, the specific details (" . . . cowpeas and smoked goat, all winter the same muddy supper . . . "), and the drama of the crippled girl's disappearance, or escape, all carry this poem along to its reaching metaphorical conclusion.

This next little poem works similarly:

NAUTILUS

a body comes apart in the bayou
like cardboard
in the lid of a jar
some kind of oyster
you take out with a knife
dogs tell it
the whole night sky
is an appaloosa

(from *Field Talk*)

The landscapes he inhabited — in Arkansas and in his imagination — were, of course, inhabited. His poems and letters are full of people. He mentions in one letter that he loves to listen to people talk. A common enough statement, and certainly not unusual for a writer (assuming a writer is a person who is interested in language), but I think the evidence is in the poems that he not only liked to listen but that he also really *heard* what was being said:

INVENTORY

A man came into the store
Told mother he was looking for a good knife
She took him behind the counter
And let him look a spell under the glass

You could smell his new clothes
What a beautiful shirt
He had on my mother told him

It was blackwatch plaid

We all got one after that
Mother ordered one
They sent forty-nine

What kind of knife are you needing she asked
I'm needing one that'll touch bottom

He looked over his shoulder when he said that
And a man buying shoelaces nodded

He said a man don't want to go shallow
You know how it is
I'd hate to come short on a critter

That's the one I want the man in the new clothes said
It's from Sweden and it'll set you back she told him

Lady I don't care

Right then I heard a car on the ridge
Hit the bedrock
It was going pretty fast

Now how's about a nice stone
To go along with the knife she said
The man looked over his shoulder again
This time out the window

O.Z. was hoeing weeds around the monuments
We sold on the side

I mean a whetstone
Just for the steel she smiled

He swallowed like it was dark medicine
He didn't laugh
Just so it'll cut once lady
Is all I care
He told her trying it out on the sole
Of his new issue boot

Midnight or so I was down in the storm cellar
Stealing a little jam
By God if I didn't hear someone
Hit the bedrock again

This poem is so clear we might forget how it got so clear: the timing of the dialogue between the Mother/shopkeeper and the man buying the knife, the I of the poem and his activity. The perfect brief presences of the other two people in the poem (the man buying shoelaces and O.Z.), the sly joke about the whetstone . . . Stanford's eyes and ears are perfectly tuned in this poem.

He was obviously close to this land and the people there. This excerpt from a letter (undated, but probably 1974) seems almost like a prosepoem to me:

A good friend of mine died. Cancer. He was a hermit, and something of a river. He was the only black for six or seven North and East of here. He lived in a shack on the side of a hill with a bunch of dogs. I met him when I was staying in a Hotel in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. We got drunk and I ended up at his place. We got to be real close over the last few years. He knew he was dying so he had a signal. If there was a white handkerchief tied to the tree outside his window, better pull up the hill and see about him. He told me he wanted to die in his place, and that he wanted his dogs shot, and his cat Jake given to some kid. The pain really started getting bad the last few months. You could hear him hollering down the hill. He said he would listen to his radio and pet his cat and holler all night, couldn't sleep because of the pain. Well, he's dead now. The mountain people, with whom he was closest, called him "The Nigger Richard" like it was an old New England title or Victorian name, "The Widow this," etc., you know the language I mean. Well, he's dead now. I'm sure his grave plot will become a garden. I might steal turnips there.

I hope I'm not giving, and I hope his poems don't give, people the impression that Frank Stanford was some kind of hillbilly visionary or Arkansan *idiot savant*. He wasn't. He was extremely well read and was constantly referring to books and poets he loved. He knew modern American poetry and also read exten-

sively in foreign literature. He particularly seemed to love French poetry — from Baudelaire through the surrealists and beyond. He read contemporary American poetry when he could find books or magazines. He was always asking about new books by younger American poets — who to read, what magazines were good, etc. He did adaptations and translations of Bertolucci, Cocteau, Prévert, Pasolini, Vallejo, and others. With his wife, Ginny Couch Stanford, and a friend, C.D. Wright, he began a small press called Lost Roads Publishing. He was staggeringly prolific: he published ten books in his lifetime and two more are due posthumously. Most of these are small or average sized books but one, *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*, is a single 542-page poem. He sent me innumerable manuscripts during our correspondence and I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that there are *at least* 500 unpublished poems. He says in another letter that he has "about 40 stories typed up." As far as I know only one of his stories has been printed — in *The Iowa Review* three or four years ago. He wrote and directed films on the work and lives of distinguished American writers (Ransom, Eberhart, Wilbur, Cowley, Penn Warren). Occasionally, he wrote an essay. And: he earned the major part of his living as a land surveyor. *He did some work.*

One of the problems of reading Frank Stanford is, of course, the immense bulk of the material. The work is also, as you'd expect, somewhat uneven. Even though his voice is always unique a number of the poems seem tossed away, their connections off. He relies on simile too much in some poems and even though he has a superb aural sense he can sometimes be rhythmically monotonous. But the point of this is not to quarrel with the faults of his weaker poems.

Nor is the point to define exactly what is extraordinary about Stanford's work. As I said earlier, to me, it's his straddling, his balancing act between this world and another. Maybe he thought, finally, that the other world was death. If he did think that, I think he was wrong, because the other world he so skillfully creates in his poems *is within this world*. He does this in the manner of all good poets: by intensifying the everyday, the real, the literal.

I suppose that one of the major paradoxes about his work is that he wrote so much and so originally (and often in a humorous manner) about death. In fact, both poems I've quoted so far, and the larger letter excerpt, are about death. I guess it's safe to say he was obsessed with death: death as persona, death as friend, death as enemy, death in so many guises. He begins one poem ("Time Forks Perpetually Toward Innumerable Futures In One Of Them I Am Your Enemy") like this:

I am going to die

Friends who made good,
Friends who did not,
I am going
Down into the Egypt of your sex,
The lands of your mystery and death.

Two other poems in one of his later books, *Constant Stranger*, "Death And The Arkansas River" (which is too long to quote here) and this one, are further examples:

AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH

Girls kiss in the street.

The cucumbers swell on the vine
And the lame cheerleader
Is let off early after the game.

Someone is thinking: are there enough
smokes to go around,
Who will go for coffee,
Will the ringing bother the others
On the party line?

No one can get through
to the house of the bereaved.

The coon dogs are lonely tonight,
But not the priest.

I am still down
In Arkansas, still drinking
Charter and branch water,
Looking for a fight.

The undertaker creeps out of his daughter's room.
The janitor beats a spider with a broom.

He never — at least not directly or in poems I've read — writes about suicide, about the longing to get out, as does, say, John Berryman. . . . I admit that, even though I didn't know him, I am sad, confused, and angry at his loss. I don't know why he chose to kill himself and I don't particularly care. I do feel, to take a phrase from Adrienne Rich, that he's "wastefully dead." We do, of course, have his work, and as I've said, there's a great deal of it. I think the best of it should last but I can't, at this point, say to myself: "But he'll live on through his work." Bullshit. Frank Stanford is dead and because of that fact *he won't be writing any more poems*. That is a loss. Not as great as the loss of his life, but a loss. I, for one, will miss him. And I know others will — even if he'd never written a poem in his life. He was a poet of rare talent, imagination, and insight, and he says in a poem called "Farewell":

Is a word
That must be
Like a sword
That has worn out
The scabbard.

His books are *The Singing Knives* (1971), *St Francis and the Wolf* (1972), *Shade* (1973), *Let Him Lay There* (1974), *Ladies from Hell* (1974), *Field Talk* (1975), *Arkansas Bench Stone* (1975), *Approacheth the Ship in Wonder* (1976), all from Mill Mountain Press, and *Constant Stranger* (1976) and *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* (1977), both from Lost Roads Publishing. Due soon: *Crib Death* from Ironwood Press, and *You* from Lost Roads.

TWO POEMS ON BITCH

(1)

Don't curse the kite, I said, and on the third day
the red, nay-saying, unnimble kite
flew much better and two swallows fought in its air.
The pinwheel did as well as in Alaska.
You lay on your back
as you do when I want you.
I watched a June bug piece together flight.
The kite had been stubborn in nothing.
A girl re-read her maroon diary, the one from her
eleventh year.
Already it reminded her of things past,
while the kite logged hours in the air . . .

(2)

I ruffled the broad back of the red bitch
and unwrapped the turkey heart from my sack.
Her owners kept their eyebrows still.
This was the reward of friendship.
She ran on the sand, having fed on the heart of a bird.
She went and stood in the water, looking straight at
the oncoming wave.
She danced away under the red kite.
I liked to lose her in the distance for it was no great
loss.
What did the purple starfish think of her feet?
What did the orange starfish think of her feet
that were not there the next day
or the next. The green anemones folded their fingers
together as if they had just eaten the word bitch.
Those who are owned — take them a bite
in some old foil you've saved
and will save, battered as if by the heart.

GAMES

I play pool. I am toward the faces
 Across the room. My daughter
Takes these quarters for the pinball
 She plays with a dying

Butterfly on her left hand. It
 Will not leave, it is tired,
And all its strength is in its legs.
 I set it on my arm

Then give it back. I'll take her hand
 That way when dying, stick
Out my tongue, like its curled black one,
 Green crutch of a Kentucky

Wonder Bean, and *Look*, she cries,
 Its body fell away.
It's all wings and head. Short life
 Has culled mistaken

Parts and dropped the mite-sized heart and
 Killed the steering place.
Or else she did this, quickened its
 Death among the games

And flunked it too soon. And even so
 The golden-mica'd wings
Are best. She forgets it easily,
 Who never speaks of losing.

BLUE-BLACK IMAGE

for Pam Durban

Roots that are cut are monk's-robe yellow,
holy men rubbed with turmeric to resemble
some lurex curry for the table.

Yet these are the roots of the blue-black Oregon
grapes, plentiful and round over their wire-sharp
leaves full of caught rain. The leaves
never pricked the grapes, only the picker.

The roots — yellow dye; the berries — dye of a different
devotion, like a Bible in a room among small things
that reflect the sky, that black leather shut
on its account of the birth of lights.

Initially, it was the Navy wall of my father's chest
to an infant in war. Then later, after miles
of green wandering pursuing a golf ball,
the flight of a dragonfly against a black hazard.
Mother takes me to the doctor's particular needle
for women: blue-black was my faint
into adulthood — conceived as I rose from her feet.

Sometimes in Oak Land's cemetery
I sit beneath a huge angel and she has
just bare toes and a slip for the snow.
But a crowd of people depend on her wings,
her wings so used they're patched with tar and jay feathers.
Not used the way of ducks who bury heads
in theirs, the better to listen to their hearts.
But this giant decoy draws all hunters,
makes them agree. Whenever I hear a volley of silence
I smell the tar tank on a potholed street
in Willow Glen. I pull it to the angel now,
I bring these few feathers a target left.

CITY GINKGOS

our kin,
cyanotic, their voluble
crowns heavenward, root in the immediate

concrete. if I could speak ginkgo,
its verbs excepted,
I'd show our Chicano neighbor's blue
face, some sky pigment, as he hangs himself

for the nights his wife slept elsewhere.
the ginkgo nouns suffice but its flimsy
limb lets go & he comes down

in his own yard, gutteral but alive.
things safe to say in English we say —
no ironies, no euphemism briefly
dipped in pain, but things
dissolved in the senses that can't

come back words.
I can pretend Spanish, I can pretend
enough to moan
into intelligence his wife's lament
living with a man, you talk & talk
until the tongue
detached from words crawls

out of love.

THE WATER POEM

Meditation and water are wedded forever.
—Melville

When the damp thumb blacks the candle,
when you pull on the flannel hood,
eyestinging with camphor, the croup lamp
steaming, there is a little water, a secret water,
enough to lubricate a kiss, enough
to fill the eyesac, enough to christen a bronze shoe.

Water is a dull normal usually,
though when it's depressed, the pumps cough nitrate,
faucets clack their brass beaks.

Water can hate us, friends, as it trails
our sour politics. What is a man but polluted water?
Yet we are blood brothers.

The clouded humor
of the ceiling stares at the mirror of the sheets.
What are those waterlogged Aquarians doing?
The plaster falls because its water is disgusted.

As to life on the moon, remember
the waters of crystalization, your cousins
in chains, loose dreamers in ice hives.

Prodigal water scratches at the back screen,
come to fill the batteries of soup,
so the spoon wicks can flame.

Now, in April, in November,
in a month of Sundays, the parish kneels
at the stations of water: Saint Oxygen
and Saint Hydrogen.

Water washes the feet of bishops.
It washes its hands of the crucifix.
It salts the blue collar, the white collar,
the goat cheese armpit, and it yellows
the windshield and sock sole.

It carries
beers to comfort stations, phonebooths
near half-pint stores. It establishes bladder
policies at border sentry stations.

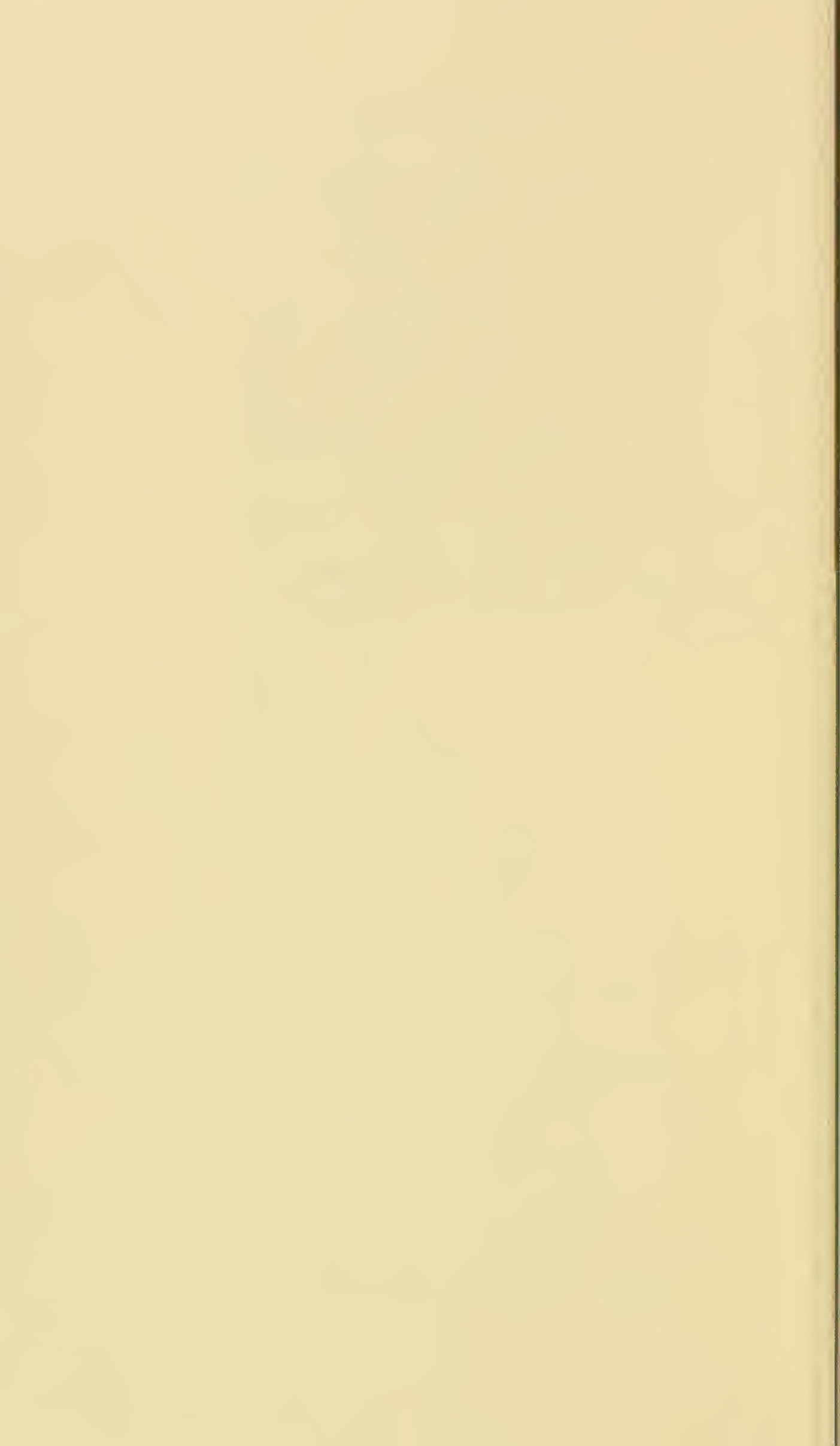
It delivers whole mammoths to Siberia.
It can quicksilver, cloud mirror, hold still,
white lightning, flume, chop,
and slip through the fingers.

When the child comes in to dinner,
wet to the knees,
he is not unhappy.

THE VOICE

Small blue flowers like points
of sky were planted to pin
the earth above me, and still
I went on reaching through leaf
and grass blade and the saw-toothed
arms of thistles for the sky
that dozed above my death.
When the first winter came
I slept and wakened in late March
to hear the flooded fields
singing their hymns to the birds.
The birds returned. And so it was
that I began to learn what changes
I had undergone. Not as in
a sea change had I been pared
down to the white essential
bones, nor did I remain huddled
around the silence after the breath
stormed and collapsed. I was large,
at first a meadow where wild
mustard quivered in warm winds.
Then I slipped effortlessly up
the foothills overlooking
that great awakening valley.
Then it seemed I was neither
the valley below or the peaks above
but a great breathing silence
that turned slowly through darkness
and light, which were the same,
toward darkness and light. I
remember the first time I spoke
in a human voice. I had been
sweeping away the last of sunset
in a small rural town, and I
passed shuddering through a woman

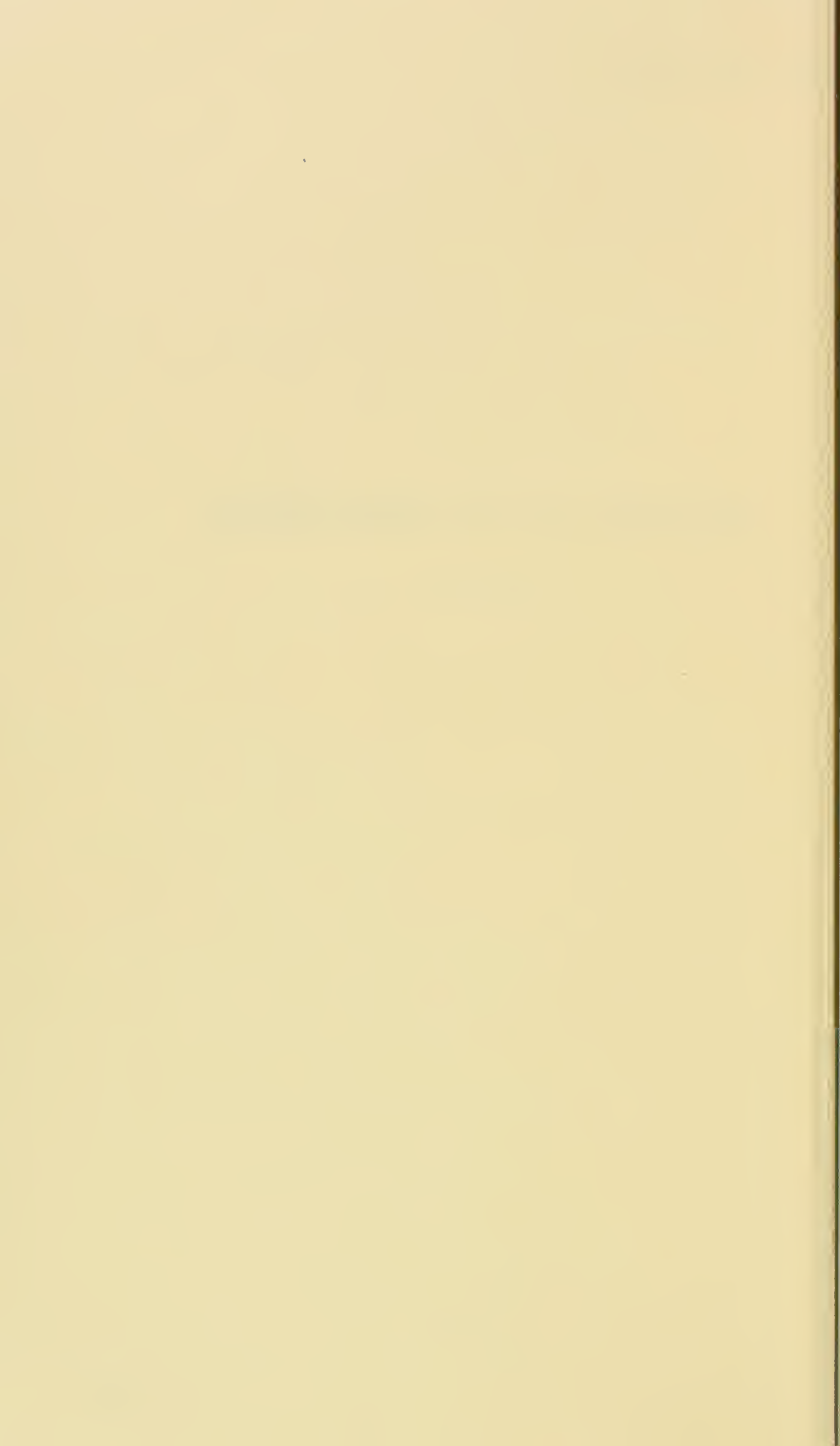
on her solitary way home, her arms
loaded with groceries. She said,
Oh my God! as though she were
lost and frightened, and so I let
the light linger until she found
her door. In truth for a while
I was scared of myself, even
my name scared me, for that's
what I'd been taught, but in
a single round of seasons I saw
no harm could come from me, and now
I embrace whatever pleases me,
and the earth is my one home,
as it always was, the earth
and perhaps some day the sky too
and all the climbing things between.



Rainer Maria Rilke

SONNETS TO ORPHEUS

PART TWO



Breathing, you invisible poem!
Worldspace incessantly having its pure
traffic with our own being. Counterweight system
in which I rhythmically occur.

Lone wave, whose
gradual sea I am;
you sparsest of possible seas —
making room.

How many places in space have already
been inside me! Many a wind
is like a son to me . . .

Do you know me, air? You, full of places which
once were mine? You — once the smooth rind,
the roundness and leaf of my speech.

As the snatched paper, nearest to hand,
sometimes captures the Master's *true* stroke,
so mirrors, often, absorb the holy
solitary smiles of young women: when

they test the morning, alone — or in
the glow served up as lamps and candles burn.
What returns to the breathing and genuine
faces, later, is merely a stale reflection.

What happens, then, when eyes have gazed
at the slow, charred glowing of the fireplace?
Life-glances, lost forever.

The earth! Who knows about her losses? Whoever
can sing of the heart, whoever can still praise,
born into such a place.

Mirrors: no one who knows has ever
described you, said what you're really like.
You are filled with gaps of time
the way holes fill a sieve.

Spendthrifts in empty drawing-rooms,
when evening arrives, deep as the woods . . .
like a sixteen-point stag, the faint shine roams
through your unreachable solitudes.

At times you seem filled with paintings.
Some seem to go straight into you — others
you've shyly sent away. Of course

the loveliest one will remain, until
there in those self-contained cheeks, clear
Narcissus, released, breaks in by force.

Oh this is the animal that never was.
They didn't know that, they just went ahead
and loved it; its walk, bearing, neck — they loved
even the light of its silent gaze.

Never existed. And yet, because they loved,
a pure creature began to occur. They always
left room for it, and in that cleared space
it simply lifted its head, and hardly needed

to exist. They never fed it grain
but rather, always, possibility.
And that gave the animal such energy

that it grew a brow-horn. A single horn.
And it came white unto a virgin here —
and *was*, in the silver mirror, and in her.

Flower-muscle, that unlocks, bit by bit,
the meadow-morning of the anemone,
until the polyphonic sky's loud light
pours down into her lap,

muscle of endless receptiveness
stretched in the quiet blossom-star,
so overcome, sometimes, by fullness,
that sundown's signal to rest

barely allows you to refurl
the overextended petals: you, the drive
and energy of how many worlds!

We violent ones last longer.
But *when*, in which of all our lives,
are we so open, such receivers?

Rose, growing throne of yourself, to the ancients
you were a chalice with a simple rim.
For us you're the full, innumerable bloom,
the inexhaustible subject.

In your opulence you seem like clothing around clothing
around a body that's nothing more than brightness;
but your separate leaf is both the shunning
and the denial of every kind of dress.

For centuries your fragrance called across
its sweetest names to us; it's there
suddenly, hanging in the air like fame.

Still, we don't know what to call it. We guess . . .
and memory, summoned from hours we *could* name,
gives itself up to that fragrance once more.

Flowers, kinfolk at last to arranging hands,
(hands of young women, long ago and now), you
who lay on the garden table, often from rim to
rim, weary and mildly wounded

awaiting the water that would revive you
from death, already begun —, and now
lifted again between the streaming poles
of feeling fingers, that have even more power

to do good than you guessed, weightless ones,
when you came to in the jug, cooling slowly
and giving off the warmth of young women

like confessions, like thick, fatiguing sins
the act of plucking brought on, relating you again
to those who ally themselves with your blooming.

You few, you playmates of time and time ago,
there in the scattered gardens of the town:
how we found each other, gingerly made friends,
and, like the lamb with the talking scroll,

spoke silently. If we happened to please each other
nobody owned that. Whose would it be?
And how it melted among the passers-by
and vanished among the fears of the long year.

Carriages rolled around us, drawn along unperturbed,
houses stood round us, strong but unreal — and nothing
ever recognized us. What in this world *was* real?

Nothing. Only the balls. Their magnificent curves.
Not even the children . . . But sometimes one would step,
oh little vanishing thing, under the falling ball.

In memoriam Egon von Rilke

So you've abandoned torture? And the iron chains
 that used to shackle necks? Justicers, don't boast.
 Not one neck is raised, not one heart, because some ordained
 cramp of mercy gave you a mild twist.

The scaffold will give back what time has given it
 as children do playthings left from old
 birthdays. Into the pure, into the high, into the heart
 swung wide like gates, he'd enter differently, the god

of genuine mercy. He would come forcefully, he'd grip
 those around him with radiance, the way of the godlike.
More than a wind for the giant, unshakable ships.

And not less than the fine and private feeling
 that conquers us silently from within, like
 the child of an infinite coupling, quietly playing.

The machine: as long as it disobeys, and dares
to exist in the spirit, it threatens all we've won.
Against the fine shows of the hand

those sweet hesitations

it cuts the harsh building's stones to be even more severe.

It never stays back where for once we could just
leave it behind, oiling itself in the shut factory.
It is life — it thinks it does everything best,
with the same calm resolve to regulate, make, and destroy.

But existence can still enchant us; in a hundred
places, we find its wells and springs. A play of pure forces
that no one can touch without wanting to kneel in wonder.

Words still fail softly before the unsayable . . .
And music, always new, builds in unusable space
and out of the shakiest stones, her holiest house.

Many a rule for death has been calmly set up
 since we started to hunt, we who must conquer further;
 yet better than any net or trap I know *you*, canvas strip,
 that they used to let down into the Carso caverns.

They'd lower you gently, as if you were some signal
 in honor of peace. But then: the farmhand gave you a twitch
 — and out of the caves Night tossed a bleached handful
 of giddy doves to the light . . . But even *that* is all right.

Let no gasp of pity be heard from the witness
 any more than the hunter, who does as he must, alert
 and ready to act when the moment is right.

Killing is one form of our wandering sadness . . .
 Whatever has happened to us
 is pure in the radiant spirit.

You must *wish* for change. Be rapt for the flame wherein
 a thing eludes you, gaudy with flux; the spirit
 that masters the earthly by tracing its outlines
 loves most in the figure's swing the rotating point.

What shuts itself up in staying is already rigid;
 does it think itself safe in the shelter of nondescript gray?
 Wait: from a distance the hardest is warning the hard.
 Watch out —, an absent hammer is raised!

He who pours himself out like a spring — Perception perceives
 him,
 and leads him, delighted, through brilliant regions and realms
 that end with beginnings, and often with endings begin.

Each happy space they traverse, amazed, is a child
 or grandchild of parting. And ever since she felt laurel-like,
 Daphne, transformed, has wished you would change yourself
 to wind.

Be ahead of all partings, as if they were
behind you, like the winter that's just past.
For among the winters is one so endlessly winter
that your heart, if you overwinter, can survive it.

Be dead in Eurydice, always —, climb with more song,
climb with more praise, back up into pure relation.
Here in the kingdom of decay, among what's wasting,
be a tingling glass that shatters itself with sound.

Exist while you know the state of nonexistence,
the endless ground of your own deep pulse, so that
you can fulfill it completely this one time.

With the used-up, as well as the muffled and useless
stock of full nature, the unreckoned sum,
count yourself in, rejoicing, and then demolish the count.

Look at the flowers, loyal to the earth —
we lend them fate from fate's border, but
who knows if they regret the way they wither?
Maybe it's we who are their real regret.

All things want to float. And we go around like burdens,
settling ourselves on everything, ravished by weight;
what deadly teachers we are, when things in fact
have the gift of forever being children.

If someone took them into inmost sleep and slept
soundly with things — how lightly he might rise
changed, to changed days, from that communal depth.

Or maybe he'd stay; and they'd blossom and praise
him, the convert, now one with those brothers and sisters
all still in the midst of the winds and the meadows.

Oh fountain-mouth, giver, you never-tiring
mouth that says and says the same pure thing —
you marble mask, held up against
the water's streaming face. And in the distances

the aqueducts' descent. From far away,
from the Apennine slopes, passing graves,
they carry you your speech, which then
spills down the aging blackness of your chin

and falls into the basin there.

Basin: the sleeping, sidelong ear,
the marble ear in which you always speak.

One of the earth's ears. So that she's talking
just to herself. Push a pitcher in between,
she'll think you're interrupting.

The place we rip open again and again
that always heals — that's God.
We are all sharp-edged from our need
to know; He is spread out, serene.

Even the pure and blessed libations
He takes into His world in just
one way: by staying motionless,
never controlling the way things turn out.

Only the dead drink
from that spring that we can *hear*,
when the god signals to them, silently.

Just the noise of it reaches us.
And the lamb begs for its bell
out of its quieter instinct.

In what watered, ever-blissful gardens? On what trees?
From what flower-goblets, gently stripped of petals,
do these exotic fruits of consolation ripen? These
luscious fruits — you might find one in the trampled

meadow of your loss. And time and time again
you wonder: at the size of the fruit, its firm
well-being, the smoothness of its skin, and then
that some quick bird didn't beat you to it, or a worm

come jealous from below. Are there trees, then,
angel-visited, strangely raised by slow and hidden
gardeners, that bear for us though we don't own them?

Haven't we ever been able, we shadows, we phantoms,
by our ripe-too-soon and withering behavior,
to shatter the calm of that unruffled summer?

Dancer: oh you relaying of every
 vanishing into a stride: how you performed it there!
 And the twirl at the finish, that tree made of energy,
 didn't it fully capture the swing of the year?

Didn't that tree's crown suddenly blossom with quiet
 so your whirling could swarm up around it? And over you
 wasn't it sun, wasn't it summer, the warmth of it,
 this immeasurable warmth, coming from you?

But it bore too, it bore, your tree of ecstasy.
 What are these but its tranquil fruits: the pitcher,
 streaked with its ripening, the even riper vase.

And in the pictures: the sketch
 that your eyebrow's dark stroke made
 on the wall of its own swift turn — didn't it stay?

Somewhere, coddled in the bank, gold lives,
chummy with thousands. But this blindman, this beggar:
even to copper pennies he's a lost place, he's
the dusty corner underneath the dresser.

Money's at home in all the shops — has many
ways to dress: silks, carnations, furs. In the pause
between each breath the silent beggar stands,
while it wakes and sleeps, all that breathing money.

Oh how does it close at night, that always open hand?
Fate brings it back each day and holds it out:
glowing, miserable, endlessly asking for hurt.

If only some witness would finally, in wonder,
grasp its persistence and praise it. Sayable just to the singer.
Audible just to the god.

From star to star: how far that is! Yet how much farther
the things we learn from near at hand.

Some person, a child for instance . . . then next to him,
another —
an unbelievable distance.

Maybe Fate measures us in being-spaces
and that's what seems so strange; consider
how many such spaces from a woman to a man
when she avoids him and at the same time *cares*.

Everything's distant —, and the circle doesn't close.
On the gaily set table, there on that platter,
look: the strange faces of fish.

Fish are dumb . . . so we thought. Who knows?
Is there a place where, even in their absence,
we can speak the language of fish?

Sing the gardens, my heart, that you don't know; gardens
like those poured in glass, clear, unattainable.

Water and roses of Isfahan, Shiraz,
sing them happily, praise them, call them incomparable.

Show, heart, that you don't miss them, show
how they have you in mind as they ripen their figs;
how you hobnob with breezes that almost grow
visible there, among blossoming twigs.

Shun the error of thinking you've missed something,
because a resolve, once taken, means: to be!
Silk thread — you went into the weaving.

Whatever picture you may be inwardly part of
(even a moment in Pain's biography),
feel that what's meant is the whole splendid carpet.

Oh but in spite of Fate: the marvelous overflows
of our existence, foaming up into parks, — or as
stone men, flanking the keystones
of high portals, rearing up under balconies!

Oh the brazen bell, that swings its bludgeon
daily against the workaday and commonplace.
Or the *one* in Karnak, the column, the column,
that outlasts the almost eternal temples.

Today the overspills plunge by, the same ones,
but only as haste, out of the level yellow day
into a night blinding with magnified light.

But the frenzy passes and leaves no traces.
Flightcurves through air and those who rode them away,
none, maybe, is useless. Yet only as thought.

Of all your hours, call me to the one
that constantly resists you: close
as a dog's imploring face,
but always turning away again

just when you think you've grasped it.
What's withdrawn that way is what's most yours.
We are free. There, where we thought we were
welcome, that's where we were dismissed.

Fearful, we call for a handhold;
sometimes we're too young for what is old
and too old for what never was,

we who do justice only when we can praise
because we are the branch and we are the steel
and the sweetness of ripening trouble.

This delight, always fresh, in the loosening of soil!
The earliest risk-takers — almost no one helped them.
But cities rose up by blissful gulfs all the same,
pitchers filled, all the same, with water, with oil.

Gods — first we sketch them in daring designs
that surly Fate tears up for us again.
But they are the immortals. Look, we can
hear those out who will hear us at the end.

We're thousand-year generations: mothers and fathers,
filled more and more with the child of the future
so that someday, climbing over, it can convulse us.

We're the endlessly risked ones; what time-spans are ours!
And only tight-lipped Death knows what we really are
and what he always gets from the way he lends us.

Listen. You can hear harrows at work,
the first ones. Again, the human rhythms
in the hanging stillness of the rank
early-spring earth. What's coming seems

untasted, completely new. What
came to you so often seems now to
come the first time. You always expected it,
but you never took it. It took you.

Even leaves that hung on the oaks all winter
seem, in the evening, to be a future brown.
Sometimes the winds pass a signal around.

The thickets are black. But heaps of manure
are an even darker black in the pastures.
Every hour that goes by is younger.

How a bird's cry can move us . . .
 Any cry, once made.
 But the children, playing outside,
 already cry beyond real cries.

Cry about chance. Into gaps that occur
 in this world-space (gaps where the pure
 birdcry slips through, as we slip into dreams —)
 they drive their thin wedges of scream.

Alas, where are we? Always freer,
 like kites broken loose and scattered,
 we chase through mid-air, laughter-fringed,

wind-tattered, — Arrange these criers,
 singing god! that they waken and thunder together,
 a current to carry the head and the lyre.

Does Time, the destroyer, really exist?
Will it crumble the castle on the mountain there?
And when will the Demiurge assault this heart
that belongs to the gods forever?

Are we really as anxiously breakable
as Fate wants us to think? Can it
be that childhood, so deep, so promiscuous,
is killed, later on, at the root?

Ah, the phantom of evanescence —
it goes right through the innocent,
the susceptible, as though it were vapor.

Whatever we are, driving and driven,
we matter, still, among lasting powers,
as one of the habits gods have.

Oh come and go. Half-child, dance out the whole
figure for a moment, complete it, a pure
star-pattern, one of those dances where
we momentarily excel

Nature's sluggish order. For she only roused herself
to full attention, listening, when Orpheus sang.
You were still moved by that event, far-off,
and a little surprised if a tree took too long

deciding to go along with you to hear.
You still knew the place where the lyre
rose through its own sound — the unheard-of center.

For this you practiced lovely steps alone,
hoping, one day, to turn your friend's own
face and way toward that perfect celebration.

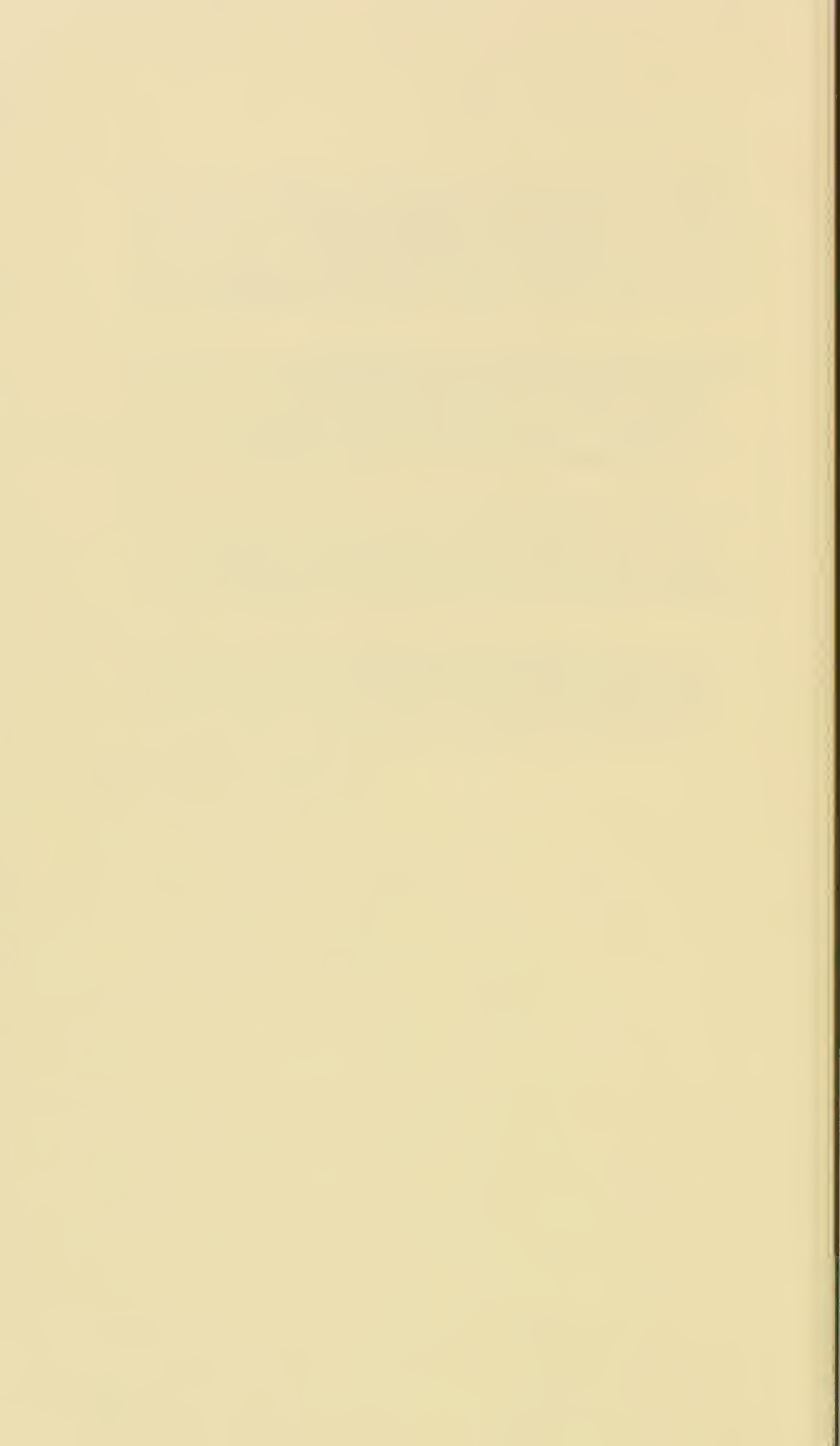
Silent friend of many distances, feel
how your breath is enlarging space.
Among the rafters of dark belfries
let yourself ring. What preys on you will

strengthen from such nourishment.
Come and go with metamorphosis.
What's your most painful experience?
If what you drink's bitter, turn to wine.

In this huge night, become
the magic at the crossways of your senses.
Be what their strange encounter means.

And if the earthly forgets you,
say to the quiet earth: I flow.
Speak to the rushing water — say: I am.

translated by David Young



CONTRIBUTORS

JON ANDERSON teaches in the MFA program at the University of Arizona. He's the author of **Death & Friends** and **In Sepia** (both Pittsburgh).

ALOYSIUS BERTRAND is known as the father of the prose poem; these selections are from his 1842 posthumous collection, **Gaspard de la nuit**. JAMES WEEKS works for a small art publisher in New York.

PHILIP BOOTH is working on his sixth book, of which the two poems here will be part.

NORMAN DUBIE's **The City of the Olesha Fruit** is just out from Doubleday. He has poems appearing in the **New Yorker**, **Poetry**, and **Missouri Review**.

LINDA GREGERSON lives and writes poems near Stanford where she studies and writes about poets. She had a dance article in a recent issue of **New Performance**, and poems recent and forthcoming in **Ironwood**, **Ohio Review**, and **Quarterly West**.

JERZY HARASYMOWICZ is one of Poland's few surrealist poets. He was born in 1933 and has published over fifteen volumes of poetry. His translator, JOHN PIJEWSKI, is writer-in-residence at the Philips Exeter Academy.

RICHARD HUGO's selected poems will be published this spring by Norton. His book on

writing, **The Triggering Town**, is just out.

MARILYN JOHNSON has an M.A. in writing from New Hampshire, and works as an associate editor at **Esquire**.

MARILYN KRYSL, who teaches creative writing at the U. of Colorado at Boulder, is the author of **Saying Things**, by Marilyn Thompson (U. of Nebraska Press).

PHILIP LEVINE has two new books, **Ashes** and **7 Years from Somewhere**, out from Atheneum this spring. He has recently been in residence at the National University of Australia, Canberra, and at Vassar.

THOMAS LUX's new book, **Sunday**, will be published by Houghton Mifflin next fall. "This year, this year, the Red Sox. . . ."

SANDRA MCPHERSON'S **The Year of Our Birth** (Ecco) has just been nominated for a National Book Award.

We're pleased to represent the work of BENJAMIN PÉRET, the great French surrealist, in **FIELD** again. KEITH HOLLAMAN, who works on the dictionary at Random House, writes: "It's reported that Péret's first exposure to poetry was a volume of Mallarmé's that he found on a bench at a railroad station during World War I. He wrote with such a pure state of 'vacancy' that he often could not identify his own poem

when the surrealists would meet to read poems aloud."

The first part of RAINER MARIA RILKE's **Sonnets to Orpheus** appeared in *FIELD* 19. DAVID YOUNG is presently writing in London on a Guggenheim.

DENNIS SCHMITZ's new book, **String**, will be published by Ecco next winter.

GARY SNYDER, who has been awarded a Guggenheim and the Pulitzer and Bollingen Poetry Prizes, is one of his generation's leading poets. An NEA grant

allowed us to commission this essay as a talk at Oberlin last fall.

WILLIAM STAFFORD's **Stories that Could Be True: New and Collected Poems** appeared from Harper & Row in 1977, and a collection of prose pieces about the writing process, **Writing the Australian Crawl**, was published last year by the University of Michigan Press.

JOHN WOODS' most recent books are **Striking the Earth** (Indiana, 1976) and **Thirty Years on the Force** (Juniper Press, 1977). He teaches at Western Michigan University.

INDEX TO FIELD, Nos. 11-20 Fall 1974-Spring 1979

AGUSTINI, DELMIRA		Messire Jean	20,47
Unspeakable	14,16	Lepers	20,48
AICHINGER, ILSE		BLESSING, LEE	
Hemlin	13,76	The Golden Age	14,31
AKHMATOVA, ANNA		BLY, ROBERT	
Northern Elegies	18,15	The Sleeper	13,95
"It was frightful . . ."	18,21	The Pail	13,96
AMOROSI, RAY		Finding the Father	13,97
The Good Teacher	12,72	ESSAY: Rilke's BOOK OF	
ANDERSON, JON		HOURS	18,93
The Milky Way	20,44	BOOTH, PHILIP	
ARTMANN, H.C.		Rates	17,87
The Blacksmith's Shop	13,37	Out of the Ordinary	20,7
The Tea Merchant	13,38	Calendar	20,8
ASPENSTRÖM, WERNER		BRAMBACH, RAINER	
The Heart	11,30	Going Home	18,31
The Oars	11,31	Poor Prospects for Drinkers	18,32
The Horse	11,32	Sung Landscape	18,33
ATWOOD, MARGARET		Under Appletrees	18,33
Night Poem	17,38	Beyond Rjeka	18,34
The Woman Who Could Not Live		BRUCE, DEBRA	
With Her Faulty Heart	18,74	For Bad Grandmother and	
The Woman Makes Peace With		Betty Bumhead	17,23
Her Faulty Heart	18,76	CARTELLI, MARY ANNE	
Nasturtium	18,78	Instructions on the Way	
Dust	18,80	to the Orifices	12,50
BELL, MARVIN		Water	12,52
Who Killed Christ?	11,26	COLLINS, BILLY	
Following	11,27	The Books of Boyhood	19,54
Garlic	11,28	All Ears	19,55
Iowa Land	11,29	The Sphere	19,56
ESSAY: How We Think Back	15,21	COOPER, JANE	
Gemwood	15,27	ESSAY: On The Making of	
ESSAY: Perhaps Here	18,41	Three Poems	18,64
BENEDIKT, MICHAEL		DILLARD, ANNIE	
The Meat Epitaph	12,78	The Sign of Your Father	11,23
BERTRAND, ALOYSIUS		Conifers	11,25
Leaving for the Sabbath	13,10	DUBIE, NORMAN	
The Pointed Beard	13,11	The Piano	14,9
The Gothic Room	13,12	The Infant	16,79
Moonlight	13,13	The Composer's Winter	
The Five Fingers of the		Dream	18,22
Hand	13,14	Coleridge Crossing the Plain	
Haarlem	13,15	of Jars: 1833	20,9
The Tulip Merchant	13,16		

EDSON, RUSSELL		Nothing Simple	13,17
A Cottage in the Wood	12,8	Sonnet to Be Read By the	
The Native	12,9	Blind: Notes	13,18
The Hand Squeezing	12,10	ESSAY: Confusing But Never	
The Windows of the Castle	12,11	Confused	18,57
ESSAY: Portrait of the		GREGERSON, LINDA	
Writer as a Fat Man	13,19	The Note	11,56
The Falling Out of Bed		Closet	11,57
Series	18,5	Bowls	11,58
The Wounded Breakfast	18,6	Norway	14,18
The Unforgiven	18,7	Rain	17,19
The Traffic	18,8	Fire in the Conservatory	20,18
The Doorway Trap	18,9	GUNST, MARY	
EICH, GÜNTER		This Poem Came to Me As	
Ryoanji	14,20	in a Poem	11,49
Continuing the Conversation	14,23	Both	11,50
ENDER, ALISON		HAAGENSEN, JAN	
Something about Urgency	14,65	Yard Tree	15,11
EVERWINE, PETER		Ridden Fields	15,12
Routes	11,42	Brought	15,13
Late Hour	11,43	Mansion Sites	15,14
FOLLAIN, JEAN		Flock	17,89
"The women say . . ."	11,44	Chicken Wings	17,91
"Schoolchildren holding		HANNIGAN, PAUL	
hands . . ."	11,45	Jan and Gwen	12,73
"The middle-aged		Joyce Carol Oates	12,74
teacher . . ."	11,46	April Fools	12,76
"A woman makes her slow		HARASYMOWICZ, JERZY	
way . . ."	11,47	The Myth of St. George	20,11
"In houses you approach		Before Dawn in March	20,13
carefully . . ."	11,48	The Land of November	20,14
ESSAY: Meanings of Poetry	15,58	Twilight	20,15
One and the Same	15,62	HARPER, MICHAEL S.	
Funeral Processions	15,62	Eve (Rachel)	13,69
Color of Sepia	15,63	Remembering John Berryman	13,71
Moment of a World	15,63	HAVIARAS, STRATIS	
In a Downpour	15,64	Checkmark	13,68
The Pose	15,64	Tree	13,68
The Ocean	15,65	HERBERT, ZBIGNIEW	
Obscure Transparency	15,65	Heraldic Observations of	
Toy	15,66	Mr. Cogito	13,53
FORKER, GREG		Caligula	13,54
Thunder	16,31	Mr. Cogito Seeks Advice	13,56
Solving the Waves	16,31	The Ardennes Forest	17,5
FRANCIS, ROBERT		A Little Box Called	
Prose Potshots	12,82	Imagination	17,7
GOLDBARTH, ALBERT		HEYNEN, JIM	
Over Time	12,53	Bloating and Its Remedies	17,30
The Origin of Porno	12,54	Who Kept Her Hand in Her	
From the Physical To	12,55	Pocket	17,31

The Boys Go to Ask a Neighbor for Some Apples	17,32	HUDDLE, DAVID	Theory	17,26
HILBERRY, CONRAD			Words	17,27
Hunger	11,36		Them	17,28
Red	11,37		Vermont	17,29
A Dialogue Concerning the Question Whether A Tennis Ball May Be Said to Hanker for the Other Side of the Net	11,38	HUGO, RICHARD	Fairfield	14,17
An Occasion	11,39		Sneosdal	18,10
ESSAY: The Structure of Galway Kinnell's <i>The Book of Nightmares</i>	12,28		Ayr	20,45
from HOUSE-MARKS:		IKEDA, PATRICIA	Wood	13,29
The Chevron	19,5		Salt	13,30
The Key	19,6	JARMAN, MARK		
The Windlass	19,7	At Sea		14,63
Another Windlass	19,8	Dead Reckoning		15,56
The House	19,9	False Subjects		15,57
The Ladder	19,10	Required Mysteries		15,57
The Pot-Hanger	19,11	My Parents Have Come Home Laughing		17,22
The Frying Pan	19,12	JENSEN, LAURA		
Note: THE BOOK OF SIGNS	19,13	Landscape		12,18
HILLMAN, BRENDA		An Age		12,19
Trois Morceaux sur la Forme d'une Poire	14,37	The Cockles		12,20
Milena	14,39	Out the Door		12,21
Telescope	19,72	Anxiety and Ashes		12,22
Anonymous Courtesan in a Jade Shroud	19,73	Household		13,32
HOLUB, MIROSLAV		Praise		13,33
Supper	12,13	The Cloud Parade		13,34
On Sisypheus	12,14	The Sparrows of Iowa		13,35
On Daedalus	12,15	Dreaming of Horses		13,36
Brief Meditation on the Butchering of Carp	12,16	Tapwater		15,51
Brief Meditation on Eyes	12,17	House is an Enigma		15,52
A Brief Meditation on Cats Growing on Trees	16,69	The Candles Draw Well After All		15,53
A Brief Meditation on Logic	16,70	As the Window Darkens		16,5
A Brief Meditation on Cows	16,71	Night Typewriter Sounds		16,6
A Brief Meditation on Laughter	16,72	Winter Evening Poem		16,7
A Brief Meditation on the Insect	16,73	Patience is a Leveling Thing		16,8
A Brief Meditation on Gargoyles	16,74	At the End of the Workbook		19,68
A Brief Meditation on an Old Woman and a Pushcart	16,76	Birthday		19,69
A Brief Meditation on Brief Meditations	16,77	The Moon Rises		19,71
		JIMÉNEZ, JUAN RAMON		
		Poe's House		15,40
		JOHNSON, MARILYN		
		Joseph		15,41
		V.		20,5
		The Probe		20,6
		JOHNSON, THOMAS		
		Hole in the Choir		13,63

KAUFMAN, SHIRLEY		Planting	16,65
from CARBON	11,64	Why I'm Not Making My Last	
Looking at Henry Moore's		Trip Now	17,93
Elephant Skull Etchings in		Little by Little	17,94
Jerusalem During the War	13,58	The Voice	20,62
Shells	18,89	LEVIS, LARRY	
Lawrence at Taos	18,90	Readings in French	12,80
Bunk Beds	19,14	A Poem of Horses	12,81
KELLY, TIMOTHY		For Zbigniew Herbert, Summer,	
Babe Ruth Pointing	15,43	1971, Los Angeles	17,8
KENNEDY, X.J.		Words for the Axe	17,9
ESSAY: On "Consumer's		The Future of Hands	17,10
Report"	15,29	The Ownership of the Night	18,105
Consumer's Report	15,32	ESSAY: Some Notes on the	
KENT, RICHARD		Gazer Within	19,28
Hillside Night-Shed	15,48	LOGAN, JOHN	
Incidental X	19,25	Prose Poem for My Brother	
A Secondary Character		and for My Teacher	
Collecting Trash	19,26	Gregory	12,24
KINNELL, GALWAY		LUX, THOMAS	
Looking at Your Face	15,77	Most of My Disembarkments	15,33
The Hen Brooding	15,77	Man Asleep in the Desert	15,34
KNOTT, BILL		Past Tense	15,35
Poem (WRIT TO A WOMAN		The Angel's Teethmarks	15,36
POET)	13,65	Dance and Swim	15,37
KOOSER, TED		Barrett and Browning	15,38
Moles	11,33	Here's to Samuel Greenberg	15,39
Houses at the Edge of		Flying Noises	19,63
Town: Nebraska	11,34	ESSAY: "Brother Leo Told Me the	
Birthday	11,35	Bell Was Ringing": On Frank	
KOPLAND, RUTGER		Stanford	20,49
Johnson Brothers Ltd.	16,9	McPHERSON, SANDRA	
"Above the hay . . ."	16,10	A Coconut for Katerina	13,48
"Spring, now everything		The Bittern	13,50
comes back to me"	16,11	To An Alcoholic	13,51
KROLOW, KARL		An Anonymous Pornographic	
No Time To Lose	15,69	Valentine	13,52
When Things Turn Green	15,70	Senility	16,67
KRYSL, MARILYN		The Mouse	16,68
Politics	20,16	Dependence on Flowers	18,100
LEVERTOV, DENISE		Sensing: Stories for a Deaf	
Blake's Baptismal Font	18,26	Friend	18,102
LEVINE, PHILIP		Two Poems on <i>Bitch</i>	20,56
For the Poets of Chile	14,44	Games	20,57
Milk Weed	16,57	Blue-Black Image	20,58
Dark Head	16,58	MACARI, ANNE MARIE	
I Could Believe	16,60	Burial Mound	17,33
Left on the Shore	16,63	Counting the Years	17,34
Travelling Music	16,64	After the Rain	17,35
		MANDELSTAM, OSIP	
		Cold Summer	14,40

MERWIN, W.S.		Gone Without Leaving an	
Passage	12,26	Address	16,32
The Hour	12,27	To Wash Your Hands	16,33
Sheep Clouds	18,35	Stale Bread	16,34
		A Bunch of Carrots	16,35
MONTALE, EUGENIO		To Sleep Standing Up	16,36
The Day of the Dead	15,54	To Wait on the Street Corner	20,20
"I lived on the third floor in those days"	15,55		
		PLUMLY, STANLEY	
		Peppergrass	15,5
		For Esther	15,6
ORLEN, STEVE			
The Question Was	17,24		
ORR, GREGORY		POPA, VASKO	
The Bullet, The Sponge,		Shadow of a Shewolf	16,25
The Face	12,47	Stepfather of Wolves	16,26
The Spider	12,48	The Other World	16,27
The Snail	12,49	Broken Horns	16,28
Four Poems About the Blank			
Page	13,6		
Feeding the Caged Owl	13,7	RABONI, GIOVANNI	
Work Gloves	16,42	The Dead and the True	18,82
Swamp Songs	16,43	Pontius P.	18,83
For Peter	16,44	Bad Year	18,84
Spring Floods	16,45	Christmas Morning	18,85
Ghosts at her Grandmother's		The Colonial Error	18,86
House	16,46	Afternoon Movies	18,87
ORR, LINDA			
How Winter Comes in a		RICH, ADRIENNE	
Sentence	11,40	Cartographies of Silence	13,5
PALEY, GRACE		RILKE, RAINER MARIA	
Stanzas: Old Age and the		Quieting of Mary at the	
Conventions of Retirement		Resurrection	11,54
Have Driven My Friends from		THE LIFE OF MARY:	
the Work They Love	19,57	The Birth of Mary	14,46
		The Presentation of	
PAPE, GREG		Mary in the Temple	14,47
A Man in the Street	17,99	The Annunciation	14,48
The Light	17,100	Mary's Visit	14,49
		Joseph's Suspicion	14,50
PASTAN, LINDA		Annunciation to the	
Setting the Table	16,38	Shepherds	14,51
The Last Food Poem	16,39	The Birth of Christ	14,52
McGuffey's First Eclectic		Rest on the Flight	
Reader	19,23	into Egypt	14,53
		The Marriage at Cana	14,54
PATIGIAN, LANCE		Before the Passion	14,55
Killing Roosters	15,16	Pietà	14,56
Out on Kearney Boulevard	15,19	Quieting of Mary at	
		the Resurrection	14,56
PÉRET, BENJAMIN		The Death of Mary	14,57
A Face to Be Hit	14,32	The Raising of Lazarus	16,14
Half Way	14,33	"I have a lot of brothers . . ."	18,95
Till Tomorrow	14,34	"You see, I want a lot . . ."	18,96
Post No Bills	14,36	"I can hardly believe that	
		this tiny death . . ."	18,97

"The kings of the world are growing old . . ."	18,98	ESSAY: Some Thoughts About the Line	11,62
"It's possible I am pushing through solid rock . . ."	18,99	A Landscape With Crutches	13,98
Sonnets to Orpheus, Part One	19,75	Nursery Rhyme	13,99
Sonnets to Orpheus, Part Two	20,65	Animal Acts	13,100
RITSOS, YANNIS		Grocery	19,52
Toward Sunday	19,17	Empire of Dreams	19,53
Slowly	19,18	SNYDER, GARY	
Red-Handed	19,19	ESSAY: Poetry, Community, & Climax	20,21
The Same Thorn	19,20	Axe Handles	20,37
Autumn Expression	19,21	Old Rotting Tree Trunk Down	20,38
Marking	19,22	SPEAR, ROBERTA	
RIZZARDI, ALFREDO		Terremoto: Antigua 1976	16,29
The Masters of the Carnival	11,60	STAFFORD, KIM	
Travel Bureau	11,61	Orcas Island	11,41
RONDON, LESLIE		STAFFORD, WILLIAM	
Come Put Your Hand	17,17	The Life I Live is Fiction, The Story I Tell Is Truth	13,90
Heraclitus	17,18	Today	13,92
ST. JOHN, DAVID		A Meeting in Berkeley in the '40s	13,93
Wedding Preparations in the Country	13,31	Notice What This Poem is Not Doing	13,94
SANER, REG		Looking For You	15,67
Homing	15,71	Miracles	15,68
Talking Back: A Dream	15,74	ESSAY: The Minuet	18,49
A Blue Glass Jar	15,75	School Days	18,88
SCHMITZ, DENNIS		About These Poems	20,40
The Man Who Buys Hides	15,44	Absences	20,41
The Feast of Tabernacles	18,27	Murder Bridge	20,42
Infinitives	18,29	A Certain Gate	20,43
Mile Hill	18,30	STANFORD, FRANK	
City Ginkgos	20,59	The Dead Man's Fiddle	11,9
SEARS, PETER		The Home Movie of Those Who Are Dead Now	11,11
Love Poem	11,55	Instead	11,12
Horse Head Swamp	16,12	BLUE YODEL Of Her Feet	12,67
Time of Mud	16,13	Allegory of Death and Night	12,68
SHELTON, RICHARD		Children at the Point of Death	12,69
Prophecy, Poetry, and the Camel's Nose	11,19	Knew It Was Love, Felt it Was Glory	12,70
SHUNTARŌ, TANIKAWA		STEWART, PAMELA	
I See a Woman	17,39	Women with Children with Winter	14,60
SIMIC, CHARLES		The Columbine Fields at Easter	14,61
The Variant	11,5	STORNI, ALFONSINA	
Light	11,6	They've Come	15,10
Eyes Fastened with Pins	11,7		
Happy End	11,8		

STRAND, MARK	
Lines for Winter	16,24
ESSAY: The Need to Change OR The Anxiety of Self- Influence	16,47
SWIFT, JOAN	
Mole	11,59
TORNES, BETH	
Sleep	17,36
Nocturnal	17,37
TUCKER, LIZA	
ESSAY: Anna Akhmatova's "Northern Elegies"	18,12
TURNER, ALBERTA	
ESSAY: Not Your Flat Tire, My Flat Tire	13,78
NOTE: Poets Teaching: A Selection	18,40
TWICHELL, CHASE	
The Chemist and His Daughter	15,78
VALENTINE, JEAN	
The Field	13,74
The Forgiveness Dream: Man from the Warsaw Ghetto	14,5
Silences: A Dream of Governments	18,38
December 21st	18,39
VARELA, BLANCA	
Madonna	15,76
WAGONER, DAVID	
Into the Nameless Places	19,59
WALKER, DAVID	
ESSAY: Stone Soup: Contem- porary Poetry and the Obsessive Image	13,39
From the Zodiac	14,28
WEIGL, BRUCE	
Mines	11,14
Convoy	11,15
Him, on the Bicycle	11,16
The Deer Hunter	11,18
Micca Farm	13,66
Watching the Baby	13,67
Painting on a T'ang Dynasty Water Vessel	16,37

WILLARD, NANCY	
James, Flying	12,62
Original Strawberry	12,63
Animals Running on a Windy Crown	12,64
Left-handed Poem	16,16
How the Hen Sold Her Eggs to the Stingy Priest	16,17
The Child. The Ring. The Road.	16,18
Bones, Scales, Etc.	16,19
Country Scene	16,21
Being Mended	16,22
Two Allegorical Figures	17,96
The Generous Body	17,97
The Photographer Gives the Moon a Dark Room	17,98
Questions My Son Asked Me, Answers I Never Gave Him	19,50
WITTINGER, ELLEN	
The Irreparable Damages	12,58
WOODS, JOHN	
The Five Dreams	12,60
The Water Poem	20,60
WRIGHT, CHARLES	
Snow	12,5
Self-Portrait in 2035	12,6
Morandi's Bottles	12,7
Dino Campana	14,91
Invisible Landscape	14,91
Born Again	14,92
Captain Dog	14,93
INTERVIEW: Charles Wright at Oberlin	17,46
Mount Caribou at Night	17,86
WRIGHT, C.D.	
Woman Looking Through a Viewmaster	17,13
Amnesiac	17,14
The End at the Bathhouse	17,15
Trance	19,61
Obedience of the Corpse	19,62
WRIGHT, FRANZ	
Drinking Back	11,51
Blood	11,52
St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church Minneapolis, 1960	17,25
WRIGHT, JAMES	
The Wheeling Gospel Tabernacle	12,65

YOUNG, DAVID	Translation	11,78
ESSAY: Second Honeymoon:	ESSAY: Language: the Poet	
Some Thoughts on	as Master and Servant	14,68



599 Ivan Generalić
Hirschenhochzeit – Ol auf Glas, 71 x 175 cm
Noce des cerfs – Deer Wedding Guests

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